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Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

7007th meeting
Tuesday, 23 July 2013, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. DiCarlo/Mr. DeLaurentis	(United States of America)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Masood Khan
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Gasana
	Togo	Mr. M'Beou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, Iceland, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Peru, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard, I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine in the United Nations to participate in this meeting.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the observer of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: Let me begin by expressing my best wishes to our Muslim colleagues on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan.

As the Middle East continues to go through a deepening crisis, with an ever-deteriorating humanitarian catastrophe in Syria and significant political developments in Egypt, the Middle East peace process remains critical to the fate of the region. Progress in the peace process and a more constructive dynamic between the parties would have important, positive regional political implications. Conversely, continued deadlock will further erode hope for an agreed two-State solution. In the effort to renew a serious dialogue between the parties, time is of the essence.

It is against that compelling background that the Secretary-General has welcomed United States Secretary of State Kerry's intense diplomatic efforts in recent months and his announcement in Amman that a basis had been established for resuming direct final status negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. We understand that the agreement is still being finalized, and that Palestinian and Israeli negotiators will join Mr. Kerry in Washington, D.C., in the near future to begin initial talks. We also note that some very tough choices will be required from both sides in the period ahead. Both leaders will have to win the support of their domestic constituencies for renewed negotiations. The meetings that President Abbas has held with the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Al-Fatah Central Committee serve as an indication thereof. The Secretary-General, encouraged by the positive developments towards negotiations, has called on both sides to show leadership, courage and responsibility in order to sustain this effort towards achieving a two-State solution.

While United States engagement is central, we are convinced of the need for a broader regional and international role in support of any political initiative, as well as continued efforts to ensure that the Palestinian Authority remains a viable interlocutor and partner. In that regard, we appreciate the ministerial meetings of the Arab League Committee with Secretary Kerry and President Abbas in Amman; the Committee made a significant difference with its statement of support. We particularly commend Jordan's important contribution to the current efforts. It is crucial to build on the opening offered by the Arab League ministerial committee's recent reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative and

the prospect of ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieving regional peace. We continue to hope that Israel will find a constructive way to respond to it.

As for the United Nations, the Council may rest assured that the Secretary-General and I on the ground will continue our engagement in support of the vital ongoing effort to revive meaningful negotiations. The Foreign Ministers of the European Union in their Council conclusions of 22 July also reaffirmed that they would give active and concrete support to help ensure that negotiations between the parties were successful. The envoys of the Quartet were recently briefed on the efforts under way and intend to meet soon to review the situation and assess how the wider international community can effectively support resumed negotiations.

The efforts to bridge the gaps between the parties are commendable, but more hard work lies ahead of us. As Secretary Kerry noted, it is important that tangible progress be made before the new General Assembly session in September. The United Nations has been clear that progress this year can be expected only if a credible political horizon for achieving a negotiated two-State solution emerges. Similarly, plans to shore up the Palestinian economy with a major boost to private-sector development are welcome, and indeed necessary, but must now be complemented by progress on the political track. In this near-to-last chance to preserve the viability of the two-State solution, we remain hopeful that renewed negotiations will be substantive and set a clear path towards that solution, namely, the end of conflict and lasting peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. Nobody but the parties themselves can make the hard choices required to achieve peace, but the international community and the region should cooperate in a concerted and committed manner to drive the peace process forward.

We should further stress that any negotiations must be accompanied by a renewed focus on visibly and tangibly improving the situation on the ground. Both parties must take every possible step to promote conditions conducive to the resumption of the political process and refrain from actions that undermine trust. In doing so, we must not forget the situation in Gaza, where practical steps to improve the humanitarian and security situation in the wake of transformations in Egypt can be an important enabler for peace and stability. We feel that this is also the time for bold steps to enhance the understanding on the ceasefire reached in November 2012 through Egyptian good offices.

Turning to events on the ground, the situation in the reporting period can be summarized as relatively quiet, but tense and volatile at the same time. The potential risk of increased instability and violence in the West Bank was illustrated on 11 July, when Israeli security forces reported seizing a rifle, ammunition and two pipe bombs during a raid in Nablus. Palestinian security forces continued working to maintain law and order in the West Bank, in coordination with Israeli security forces. On 12 July, a Palestinian explosive engineering unit safely disposed of an unexploded ordinance near Qalqiliya.

We are concerned about continued prisoner protests, including of a number of hunger strikes that have already lasted more than two months. On 14 July, Jordanian detainee Abdallah Barghouti was transferred from prison to an Israeli hospital in critical condition after 76 days of continuous hunger strike. We note that President Abbas has consistently called on Israel to address the legitimate concerns of Palestinian prisoners and, as a confidence-building step, to consider releasing prisoners, including those convicted in times predating the Oslo agreement. With the parties having now agreed to resume negotiations, I have little doubt that a meaningful prisoners release would help to build confidence and improve the situation on the ground.

Israeli security forces conducted a total of 360 search-and-arrest operations in the occupied West Bank, including in Area A, resulting in one Palestinian being shot and killed on 2 July and 134 Palestinians injured, including 24 children and six women. Three members of Israeli security forces were also injured. Four hundred and nineteen Palestinians were arrested by Israeli security forces. This includes Hamas Palestinian Legislative Council member Mohammed Abu Tair on 2 July in Ramallah, after he had previously been deported from Jerusalem.

Against the background of a UNICEF report, issued in March, on the treatment of Palestinian children by the Israeli security forces, we are also troubled by the detention in Hebron on 9 July of a five-year old Palestinian boy for several hours in a stone-throwing incident. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are reportedly checking this incident and reviewing its policies regarding the detention of children.

Israeli security forces announced a crackdown on Israelis suspected of carrying out so-called price tag attacks, with a number of reported arrests, including of one suspect in connection to the desecration of the Latrun monastery in September 2012. Tensions continued on the ground as a result of settler attacks that injured 13 Palestinians and caused extensive damage to Palestinian property. Palestinian attacks on settlers also resulted in two injuries and some material damage.

Following last month's reported slow-down, demolitions of Palestinian property in Area C and in East Jerusalem increased again during the reporting period. A total of 83 structures were demolished, leading to the displacement of 129 Palestinians, including 45 children.

I regret to inform the Council that, despite earlier reports of Israeli restraint on settlement activity, the reporting period witnessed some renewed steps in settlement planning both in the West Bank and, to a lesser extent, in East Jerusalem. Steps towards the approval and advancement of settlements involve 70 housing units in Har Homa, between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, 84 units in Nokdim, in the southern West Bank, and 700 units in Modiin Illit. A report of the Israeli State Comptroller issued on 17 July noted that there was little to no criminal law enforcement in the settlements regarding violations of planning and construction law, and that administrative procedures for demolitions are rarely implemented.

Of note, on 19 July the European Commission, drawing from earlier Council conclusions, issued guidelines that stipulate that it would provide grants and maintain relations only with Israeli institutions within the 1967 line. The guidelines, to come into force on 1 January 2014, prescribe that any Israeli legal entity receiving funding from the European Union will have to state that it has no links to the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, or the Golan Heights. Israeli officials have voiced their strong objection to these guidelines.

The position of the United Nations regarding settlements is unequivocal. They are contrary to international law and Israel's commitments under the road map. Continuing settlement activity would not be conducive to creating a favourable environment for negotiations.

In a positive development, Israel is providing a considerable number of permits for Palestinian residents of the West Bank to visit Jerusalem and Israel during Ramadan, and applying more flexible regulations at checkpoints and points of passage during the holiday. Nevertheless, visits between 10 and 17 July of Israeli groups, including senior officials, to the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif resulted in some clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli police accompanying these groups. We urge all parties to show extreme restraint and to keep the calm around this holy site.

In Gaza, the relative calm observed in June was largely maintained during the reporting period. A total of three rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel, without resulting in casualties or damage. There were also no reports of Israeli airstrikes into Gaza. Israeli forces conducted six limited incursions into Gaza and in some instances the Israeli navy forced Palestinian fishing boats ashore by shooting in their vicinity. No casualties were reported on either side.

The situation on the ground in Gaza has been affected by political developments in Egypt. For security reasons, the Rafah crossing was closed for nearly a week, and since 11 July it has been partially reopened to allow limited categories of people and those stranded on either side of the crossing to return home. Egypt also deployed two additional battalions in the Sinai to address security concerns. However, on 4 July two explosions were heard in the Israeli southern city of Eilat, without any casualty or damage, reportedly resulting from rockets fired from the Sinai. A Salafist group, Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis, took responsibility for the shooting. We strongly condemn any such shootings.

The Egyptian authorities also took robust measures against the tunnels into Gaza. As a result of these actions against illegal activity, 80 per cent of the tunnels are now no longer functioning, according to some estimates. Gaza is beginning to experience some serious shortages of fuel and basic building materials for which the tunnels had become the primary entry points due to severe restrictions on imports via the official crossings and the higher cost of fuel available from the West Bank and Israel.

While the only Israeli crossing for goods, Kerem Shalom, has remained open and is handling increased quantities of consumer goods, we are concerned that already difficult economic and humanitarian conditions in Gaza will further deteriorate if access into Gaza through legal crossings of such basic commodities as building materials is not liberalized. We are aware that the Palestinian Authority has approached the Israeli

Government on the matter, requesting that remaining restrictions on the entry of building materials via Kerem Shalom be lifted.

We encourage all parties not to forget the precarious situation in Gaza and to take advantage of the improved context between the parties to further lift the remaining closures. We call on Israel to liberalize the entry of key construction materials into Gaza so that the private sector will be able to legally procure these materials to satisfy Gaza's infrastructural needs.

The opening of Gaza and the lifting of remaining closures are part of the November 2012 understanding on the ceasefire. The other part is adherence to full calm. We therefore call on the de facto authorities in Gaza to heed their commitments. Any violation of the ceasefire by rocket fire at this politically delicate juncture is not only unacceptable but also completely irresponsible. We also call on Egypt to maintain the Rafah crossing open for people, with due consideration for Egypt's security requirements.

Let me briefly mention a few other developments. The United Nations Mine Action Service reported the removal over the past six months of most unexploded ordnance that had been dangerously stored in Gaza city, thereby greatly improving the protection of civilians there. Over 2,000 items of unexploded ordnance have been safely destroyed since January.

We continue to be concerned about death sentences in Gaza, outside of the Palestinian legal framework. Further to the four such sentences and two executions carried out during the last reporting period, a man was sentenced to death in Gaza on 14 July. We call on de facto authorities in Gaza to refrain from carrying out further executions.

All here heard the reports of the grim situation in Syria last week from Emergency Relief Coordinator Amos, High Commissioner for Refugees Guterres and Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Šimonović. The bloodshed in Syria continues unabated. The Government continues to use its military might against civilian areas, while increasingly attracting foreign fighters and using paramilitary forces. Parties to the conflict continue to fail in their obligation to protect civilians. Humanitarian needs are outpacing our efforts to increase the delivery of assistance throughout Syria. The surge in sectarian threats and violence in Syria and across the region is deeply worrisome. Syria is increasingly turning into a regional, if not global, battleground.

Unfortunately, the warring parties have not responded to appeals for a cessation of violence during Ramadan. All fighters in Syria should be reminded that those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law will be held accountable. Recent reports of military victories by the Government should not create false confidence that the conflict can be won militarily. The legitimate demands of the people in Syria cannot be met with arms, but only through vision and leadership by all Syrians, the Government and the opposition alike.

In that regard, we continue to do our best to ensure that the Geneva conference takes place as soon as possible. Joint Special Representative Brahimi has pursued his consultations and convened in Geneva two rounds of tripartite meetings with the Russian Federation and the United States to prepare for the Geneva conference on Syria. While progress has been made and convergence found between the two initiating States of the conference, a number of parameters are still under discussion.

On 6 July, the Syrian National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces elected a new leadership. The general assembly of the Coalition also increased its membership from 63 to 114 to include, inter alia, representatives of the Syrian Democratic Platform led by veteran opposition figures. It is hoped that the laudable enlargement of the Coalition proves to be an expression of Syria's political spectrum, rather than a mere response to exogenous factors.

The Secretary-General remains gravely concerned at the reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. The United Nations has received 13 such reports so far. In addition, on 9 July, the Russian Federation presented to the Secretary-General its analysis of one incident of alleged use. That and other information is currently being studied by the investigation mission. High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Angela Kane and Mr. Åke Sellström will visit Damascus this week to complete consultations on the modalities of cooperation required for the proper, safe and efficient conduct of the United Nations investigation mission. The Secretary-General hopes that the meetings in Damascus will result in a mutual understanding on access for the mission to conduct its fact-finding

activities and establish the facts pertaining to the reports received by the Secretary-General.

The situation in the Golan remains volatile, with heavy clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition occurring inside the area of separation. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force reported that during intense clashes in the vicinity of Al-Qataniya on 16 July, several artillery rounds landed in close proximity to United Nations positions, as well as across the Alpha line. Such military activities in the area of separation have the potential to escalate the situation between Israel and Syria, and jeopardize the ceasefire between the two countries.

In its presidential statement of 10 July (S/PRST/2013/9), the Council unambiguously stated the need to redouble efforts to safeguard Lebanon from the spillover of the conflict in Syria. The Secretary-General welcomes the Council's unity and continued attention, and its support for the efforts of President Sleiman and the Lebanese Armed Forces to preserve national unity and stability.

Following the fighting in Sidon last month between supporters of the Salafist Sheikh Assir and the Lebanese Armed Forces, the security forces arrested dozens of suspects. Twenty-seven have been charged, including Assir. Related violence broke out in Tripoli on 29 June, and again on 2 July, causing three fatalities. There is a real danger of further escalation in violence extending from the conflict in Syria. On 9 July, a bomb in Beirut's Shiite southern suburbs injured 53 people and caused extensive material damage. On 7 July three people were injured, including two soldiers, when a bomb exploded near Hermel, and on 16 July at least two members of Hizbullah were injured in a roadside bomb on the Masnaa highway.

At the political level, two sessions of Parliament scheduled for 1 and 16 July to vote on an extension of the term of the army commander and other issues were postponed due to a lack of quorum. Prime Minister-designate Salam continued efforts to form a Government. The delay in forming a Government is a matter of concern. We reiterate our call on all sides to engage constructively in that regard.

In a visit to Lebanon on 3 July, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas stressed the need for Palestinians in Lebanon to disassociate from the conflict in Syria and from any internal tensions in Lebanon.

On 14 July, the Lebanese security forces seized a vehicle with arms and materiel reportedly en route to Syria. On 16 July, President Sleiman reiterated his call for the implementation of the Baabda Declaration. He stated his intention to call a session of the national dialogue to discuss a defence strategy for Lebanon and consider solutions to the current crises.

The situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations and along the Blue Line remained generally quiet. UNIFIL protested the violation of the Blue Line on 12 July by IDF soldiers to secure the surroundings of the Sheikh Abbad tomb during a visit by pilgrims on the Israeli side. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis.

Last week witnessed a promising opening in the efforts under way to develop a meaningful political initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. We have now reached a decisive point. In recent years, we have shared the frustration at the political deadlock. This is the moment to translate our collective call for action into a shared sense of urgency in supporting leaders on both sides, as they must realize that this is an opening they cannot afford to lose.

Progress indeed necessitates serious political commitments if leaders on both sides are to achieve the vision of the two-State solution they have both agreed on. We do not underestimate the difficulty of developing a substantial initiative that should provide a credible horizon for achieving a two-State solution at long last. But we cannot emphasize enough that this is the moment for concerted action and continued support to the parties. The risks of forgoing the present opportunity should be clear for both sides. As the United Nations, we remain convinced that achieving the two-State solution, ending the occupation that started in 1967 and ending the conflict as envisaged by the relevant resolutions of the Council are in the best interests of both Israelis and Palestinians.

The President: I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, I wish to congratulate the United States of America on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also wish to recognize your skilled leadership, Madam President, including the current

efforts being exerted to advance peace and ensure a more stable and secure Middle East. We also express our appreciation to the United Kingdom for its efficient leadership of the Council in June. And I thank Mr. Robert Serry, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing and tireless efforts on the ground.

We meet at a critical juncture in the long history of the international community's attempts to peacefully and justly resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite decades of initiatives, processes and legislation — including firm resolutions of the Security Council based on clear tenets of international law, primarily the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and the right of peoples to self-determination — the Palestinian people continue to be denied freedom and peace remains elusive.

Yet, we are now at a turning point. Thanks to the current international and regional efforts, foremost by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, in coordination with the Arab partners of the ministerial committee for the Arab Peace Initiative and with the support of concerned States from every continent of the globe, there is an opportunity before us to make peace a reality. The decisions made at this time will determine whether the solution of two States — the State of Palestine and the State of Israel, living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders will be achieved — or whether that solution will be brought to an end by Israel's illegal policies. The consequences in that regard would be far-reaching, including the onset of alternative efforts — political, legal and popular — to end this injustice and to realize the inalienable human rights and legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian leadership is cognizant of the significance of this moment and is ready to seize this opportunity. Under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, it has responsibly cooperated with Secretary Kerry's initiative and the global efforts to relaunch the peace process for the achievement of the two-State solution, based on the parameters of the process enshrined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

The international community has acknowledged, on numerous occasions, that the Palestinian side has fulfilled its obligations and consistently acted in good faith, despite facing enormous challenges under Israeli occupation. Moreover, the Palestinian leadership has never placed conditions on the peace process. It has only called, rightfully, for the respect of international law and the United Nations resolutions that constitute the foundation of the process.

The State of Palestine believes firmly in the rule of law. All States, including Israel, the occupying Power, have an obligation to respect the rule of law; no pretext can justify a breach of the law. Such respect is vital to overcoming the obstacles that have constantly caused the peace process to fail, exacerbating conditions on the ground. It will ensure that talks to resolve all remaining status issues — on Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders, security, prisoners and water — ultimately result in the conclusion of the just and lasting peace that we have sought for decades. Moreover, we would like to stress — as has been repeatedly affirmed by the international community — that it is imperative to set clear parameters and a time frame for a successful peace process.

Indeed, the consensus international position in support of the two-State solution based, inter alia, on the parameters of the 1967 borders as the basis for the two States, with Jerusalem as the shared capital, and a just agreed solution to the question of Palestinian refugees, on the basis of the relevant resolutions, is what the Palestinian people and their leadership have been committed to for decades in word and deed. In fact, on 15 November the Palestinian people will mark 25 years since they formally accepted the two-State solution with the adoption of the Palestinian declaration of independence, in 1988. That significant compromise to establish our State on only 22 per cent of our historic homeland, for the sake of restoring our rights and ending the conflict, is among the boldest reflections of our commitment to the path of peace and compromise in spite of the historic injustice inflicted upon our people.

That commitment has been at the core of our pragmatism, from the signing of the Oslo accords, 20 years ago in September, to our engagement in all incarnations of the peace processes since the Madrid Conference, and to our legitimate actions on the international arena to safeguard and advance the rights of the Palestinian people throughout the decades. Remarkably, that commitment has prevailed in spite of the many setbacks caused by Israel's unlawful policies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including

East Jerusalem, the territory constituting the State of Palestine. Those illegal actions and the international community's failure to hold Israel accountable have continually undermined the peace process and the two-State solution, causing great hardship for our people. Yet, the Palestinian leadership has patiently adhered to the noble goals of peace and coexistence while reaffirming its commitment at all junctures, including today before the Council.

However, in order to sustain a truly meaningful process, realities on the ground must be redressed. Although we commend the initiative currently under way, we must act responsibly to ensure that such an environment is compatible with and supports the goals of the process. How can we all succeed while Israel persists with the illegal policies of its 46-year military occupation, reaffirming daily to our people its unwillingness to make peace? We cannot. Tensions, mistrust and instability will consequently continue to rise, popular belief in the possibility of peace will continue to decline and this final opportunity to realize the two-State solution will be lost.

As we emphasized in letters to the Council, since the most recent open debate Israel has regrettably continued its policy of aggression, colonization, collective punishment and oppression, deepening the occupation and the suffering of the Palestinian people, in flagrant violation of the law and disregarding calls for it to comply with attempts to revive the peace process. That has included the construction of settlements and the wall, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem and Bethlehem, as well as the Jordan Valley; the announcement of plans to build thousands of settlement units; the confiscation of hundreds of dunums of land; the forced displacement and transfer of civilians, particularly Bedouin families; the demolition of homes; violent military raids by the occupying forces in Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps; the excessive use of force against civilian protesters; daily arrests and the detention of civilians, including a five year-old child; the continued imprisonment of nearly 5,000 Palestinians, who are enduring horrific conditions and abuse, with several prisoners on hunger strike who are gravely ill; the obstruction of the freedom of movement for most; the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has entered its seventh year, causing huge humanitarian suffering; and aggravating religious sensitivities, with holy sites being threatened, especially at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the detention of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and the assaults and harassment of worshippers, including during Christian Easter observances and the holy month of Ramadan.

Meanwhile, extremist Israeli settlers continue their criminal rampage throughout our country, terrorizing civilians, attacking homes, destroying farmland and thousands of trees, vandalizing churches and mosques with vulgar displays of hatred and racism, and threatening the sanctity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The settlers act with sufficient support and encouragement from Government officials, who continue to encourage settler colonization and the unlawful annexation of Palestinian land. Recent statements by Israel's Deputy Foreign, Housing and Economy Ministers and members of the Knesset expose the extremist positions of parts of the Government of Israel, revealing their rejection of the two-State solution and of the rights of the Palestinian people. That is cause for real concern, as we seek to overcome this dangerous political impasse.

In that regard, we must reiterate that the two-State solution and Israel's settlement campaign are completely irreconcilable. Settlement activities are illegal and constitute the major obstacle to peace. Speaking of peace while engaging in its destruction makes a mockery of the international community's support for the two-State solution and sabotages all efforts towards a peaceful solution. So does claiming a readiness to negotiate without conditions, while imposing conditions on the ground such as illegal measures that entrench the occupation, diminish the viability of two States and obstruct a peace agreement. Regrettably, that has been Israel's policy to date, with settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, having increased by 355 per cent in the first quarter of 2013 alone.

We furthermore reiterate that the seizure of other people's land, their forced displacement and colonization are war crimes under the Fourth Geneva Convention, its Additional Protocol I and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We also recall that the consensus on the illegality of Israel's settlement activities goes back decades, from the first Security Council resolution on settlements — resolution 252 (1968) — to the first General Assembly resolutions on the subject, namely, resolutions 2252 (ES-V) and 2254 (ES-V), of 4 and 14 July 1967, respectively.

The international community must not waver and must continue to demand an end to these illegal actions.

There can be no excuse for continued settlement activities, regardless of how they are manifested. This message must be made clear to Israel, as was recently reaffirmed by the important guidelines adopted by the European Union, which are in line with international law and the global position regarding Israeli settlement activities in the lands occupied since June 1967, including East Jerusalem. The Europeans are to be highly commended for this step, because it can tangibly contribute to promoting compliance with the law and thus to advancing a peaceful solution.

The facts are sobering, yet we are hopeful. As stated earlier, we recognize that we are at a crossroads. We are ready to seriously engage in direct negotiations in good faith. If the opportunity for peace before us is lost, it will not be for lack of commitment by the Palestinian side or for lack of effort by the international community, including the Arab States, whose Peace Initiative stands.

For a genuine process and real progress, it is imperative that Israel affirm its proclaimed commitment to peace and the two-State solution not just in words, but in deeds. Settlements must be stopped, prisoners must be released, all collective punishment and military operations must be halted, and Israel must come to the negotiating table in good faith. Israel must choose peace, security and coexistence over the continued occupation and domination of another people.

If Israel persists with its violations, the international community must hold it accountable, acting responsibly to uphold the law, avert further destabilization and preserve the chance for peace. The Council must fulfil its duties. Remaining on the sidelines while peace, security and the two-State solution enshrined in its own resolutions are endangered is unacceptable. The Palestinian people thus continue to appeal to the international community to take the steps necessary to support the peace process towards fulfilment of the decades-long promise to assist them to finally realize their rights, justice and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders — the foundation of peace in the Middle East.

Before concluding, I must again convey to the Council our grave concerns about the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria. As the conflict rages, Palestinian refugees, like other civilians in the country, continue to suffer loss of life and injury, destruction of their homes and property and massive displacement. Those developments reconfirm the need for a just solution for the plight of the Palestinian refugees in the context of a final peace agreement and of regional peace. While recognizing the extraordinary efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other humanitarian organizations to assist the Palestine refugees in this time of crisis, including those who have fled to Lebanon and Jordan, we appeal for the redoubling of international efforts to ensure the protection of all civilians in accordance with international law and to find a political solution to this tragic conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): Let me begin by congratulating the delegation of the United States, led by Ambassador DiCarlo, for their leadership of the Security Council this month. I also want to thank the United States and especially Secretary of State John Kerry for their leadership and dedication to the peace process and for their efforts to resume the peace talks.

Israel is committed to peace and welcomes the opportunity to resume direct negotiations. Israel faces many strategic challenges, but it is nonetheless willing to take risks to bring about an end to the conflict. Abraham Lincoln said, "You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today". In 2013, one simply cannot say that one did not see, one did not hear, or one did not know.

As we speak, the Middle East is in flames. Millions of people have taken to the streets demanding better lives, better economies and greater opportunities. The façade of the so-called Arab Spring has fallen away. In its place, there remains the bloodshed, repression, chaos and instability that have long defined the region. The Council must not be divided in denouncing those nations, groups and individuals that distance us from peace by amassing dangerous weapons, using terror to further their ideology, or murdering innocent people. The world is watching and waiting to see what the Council will do. The decisions — or, as is sometimes the case, indecisions — made in this Chamber will shape the world that we pass on to our children and grandchildren. The Council's responsibility is here and now.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Council for extending the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for another six months. The United Nations troops deployed in the region have faced daunting challenges. I also want to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ladsous and the States that have stepped forward to maintain the United Nations' strategic presence.

The stories that have emerged from Syria have shocked the world. At this very moment, men, women and children are being tortured and murdered by the brutal Al-Assad regime. Under that regime, iron-fisted repression has been the rule of thumb for the Syrian people. It is time to hold Bashar Al-Al-Assad accountable for his crimes. One hundred thousand people have been slaughtered, and there is no end in sight.

The violence that has shaken Syria is sending shock waves through our region. For two years, Israelis have lived with a war that threatens to spill over into their backyards. Mortar shells are raining down on our communities, and Syrian tanks and armoured vehicles have violated the buffer zone, in defiance of the 1974 Separation of Forces Agreement.

Israel has shown maximum restraint and has no intention of interfering in the Syrian conflict, but we will not allow our citizens to be the ongoing victims of attacks. If provocations by the Syrian Government continue, Israel will have no choice but to respond accordingly.

The situation on Israel's northern border is precarious. I have said it before, and I will say it again: Al-Assad has chemical weapons, and he has proven that he is willing to do anything to cling to power. The situation is made all the more dangerous by the fact that Al-Assad has received advanced weapons systems that Israel simply cannot allow. We cannot allow weapons of that nature to fall into the hands of terrorist groups like Hizbullah.

Al-Assad's accomplice, Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah, has also literally been getting away with murder in the Middle East. For years we have heard members of the international community, including members of this Council, argue that Hizbullah is a stabilizing force in Lebanon. They have insisted that Hizbullah is a political party representing the best interests of the Lebanese people. And they accepted the fact that Hizbullah has its own private army and is using it to hold Lebanon hostage.

I suppose those same countries believe that Nasrallah was simply thinking of the best interests of the Lebanese people when he sent this army to kill his Arab brothers and sisters in Syria. And I suppose that the so-called stability that some States speak about can be seen from the car bombs and rockets that are exploding in the centre of Beirut. Nasrallah has been clear about his intentions. Last month he said, "We will bear any sacrifices and all the consequences" to keep Al-Assad in power. These are the deliberate words of a terrorist willing to drag Lebanon into the Sunni-Shiite divide and the broader region into war.

Despite all that, some States continue to argue that there is a difference between Hizbullah's political and military wings. This is like trying to distinguish between your right hand and your left hand. Surprise, surprise — no matter how you look at it, they are both attached to the same body.

Yesterday, the European Union (EU) agreed to label the military wing of Hizbullah a terrorist organization. The EU's decision is a welcome and important first step in shutting down the European channels that Hizbullah uses to launder money and fund its campaign of terror. For decades, Hizbullah has murdered countless innocent people from Africa to South America and from Asia to Europe. At long last, having realized how dangerous Hizbullah is and what it is capable of, the EU showed up late to the party to condemn the "Party of God".

It was only after Hizbullah was found guilty of murdering Europeans in Bulgaria and attempting to do the same in Cyprus that the EU agreed to consider branding the military wing a terror organization. That semi-designation allows the EU to semi join the ranks of countries like the United States, Canada, Australia and the Netherlands, which long ago branded all of Hizbullah a terrorist group.

Hizbullah is a terrorist industry working around the clock to expand into new markets. It has a business development arm devoted to money-laundering and fundraising. There is a human resources division that recruits new members. There is a marketing arm that uses the Internet to spread fundamental beliefs. And of course, there is an operations division that carries out its bloody campaigns.

The organization is as sophisticated as it is interconnected. Any attempt to distinguish between Hizbullah's military wing and political wing, while politically convenient, is entirely impractical. The

political wing raises the money to fund the military wing's terror activities. Not even the great Houdini could pull off the illusion that there is a difference between those two groups.

Europe took a significant step in the right direction, but it must go one step further and demonstrate its unequivocal condemnation of terror. In doing so, it will prevent more innocent people from dying, it will bring justice to the victims of terror, and it will put a murderous group completely out of business.

There are brave decisions that need to be made but, as the saying goes, timing is everything. While the United States has been working to bring the parties back to the negotiation table, the EU prefers to table harmful and divisive measures. Instead of setting a course towards peace, the EU is steering the Palestinians in the wrong direction. Direct negotiations and only direct negotiations are the only way forward.

For years, the naysayers have said that the sanctions imposed on Iran would have no effect. They said that the sanctions were counterproductive and that they would do nothing but foster anti-Western sentiment. Surprise, surprise — after years of crippling sanctions, when the people of Iran went to the polls last month they wanted change. From the marketplaces of Tehran to the mosques of Qom, millions of people demanded the chance to have a better life.

Many in the international community had hoped that the elections would bring about a new leader who would draw Iran back from the brink of self-ruin. Yet, for all the wishful thinking, the facts on the ground tell a different story. Ayatollah Khamenei pre-screened every presidential candidate and removed anyone that he considered too anti-establishment, too free-thinking, or too female. Mr. Rowhani may have been given a starring role in the charade of Iranian democracy, but Khamenei has remained its choreographer, director and executive producer.

The international community must judge Rowhani not by his words, but by his actions. And the reality on the ground is that Rowhani plans to put thousands of boots on the ground in Syria. And, I suppose, if one considers that those troops may kill only a moderate amount of people, then Rowhani could be considered a moderate leader. If Rowhani has not changed Iran's policy towards Syria, why would we delude ourselves into thinking that he would change his policy on Iran's nuclear weapons programme? Even with a new conductor, Iran's nuclear weapons programme continues to advance at the speed of an express train. In contrast, the international community's efforts are moving at the pace of a local train, pausing at every stop for some nations to get off and some nations to get on.

Iran's nuclear programme remains the single greatest threat not just to the Middle East, but to the entire world. The Council and every member of the international community must take action. The sanctions are working, but they are not enough. The Council must increase pressure on Iran until it stops all enrichment, removes all enriched material, closes its illegal nuclear facility in Qom, and ends its support for terrorism.

The Middle East debates, are opened each month, as today's was, with a detailed report of all of Israel's alleged infractions. Without fail, there are two distinct features to these accounts — they are very long and they are mostly wrong. Month after month, the reports provide every nuance and every detail about every balcony in Judea and Samaria. It is no coincidence that they fail to address the thousands of attacks by Palestinians on Israeli men, women and children. Apparently, Israeli security concerns are of little concern to some in this Chamber.

The report that we have heard this morning is one-sided and short-sighted. Listening to some of these reports, one would get the impression that the Palestinians arrested by the Israel Defense Forces are saints. Let me be clear. They are not Mamma Theresa. The Israel security forces are critical to ensuring security and stability in the region.

With respect to the rule of law that my colleague just mentioned, the only thing that the Palestinians should be commended on are their innovations in architecture. They seem to have a patent on the world's first prison with a revolving door. By divine intervention, everyone they have arrested has escaped miraculously the next day.

Why has the Council not heard that Palestinian terror attacks doubled between 2011 and 2012? Why has it not heard about the 34 attempted abductions that were prevented by Israeli security forces in just the first six months of the year 2013? We can imagine the consequences if even one of the kidnappings had been successful. Let me provide another number that the Council has yet to hear in the Chamber: 2,736. Last

year, there were 2,736 attacks on Israelis, including shootings, rockets, improvised explosive devices and Molotov cocktails.

It does not take the investigative skills of Sherlock Holmes to realize that those numbers are freely available and easily accessible to anyone willing to look for them. One would think that an open debate on the Middle East would include sources that are open to the public. After all, it is elementary; facts are stubborn things. But the only thing more stubborn than the facts is the insistence on presenting unbalanced reports every month. Instead of receiving reports that cloud the situation, it is time for the Council to hear reports that clarify the situation. True friends of the Palestinians should remind them that a Palestinian State will be built only through direct negotiations and hard work.

Israel is committed to the peace process and looks forward to resuming direct negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. Our vision is of two States for two peoples — one Arab and one Jewish — living side by side in peace and security. Israel has made peace with Egypt and we have made peace with Jordan. Those treaties are evidence that, with honest effort and committed leadership, peace is possible. But peace requires leaders who will reject terror and embrace partnership; leaders who oppose incitement and promote tolerance; leaders who will raise their people up, rather than tear Israel down.

As we speak, an earthquake is shaking the Middle East to its core. It is rattling the political structures and institutions that have held the region stagnant for decades. The aftershocks of that earthquake are being felt throughout the world. The tremors of truth have penetrated this Chamber. Winston Churchill said, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened."

We have seen the photographs, we have seen the stories, and we have heard the millions of people who are crying out for freedom, for opportunity and for the chance to build a better life. It is the responsibility of every member of the Council, of every nation and of every leader to advance the cause of peace. There will always be a reason to wait or to delay, but the time to act is now. It is time to condemn terror, to denounce tyranny, and to stand up for the millions of people whose lives hang in the balance.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. M'Beou (Togo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine question. I also would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine for their statements.

We are holding this open debate at a time when the region is seeing intensive diplomatic activities conducted by the United States Administration. These are intended once again to bring the Israelis and the Palestinians to the negotiating table. My country commends the efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry and welcomes the agreement in principle reached by both parties, following his six visits to the region, for the swift resumption of direct talks after three years of interruption. We welcome the announcement of a preliminary meeting in Washington, D.C., this week, during which the Palestinian negotiator, Mr. Saëb Erakat, and his Israeli counterpart, Ms. Tzipi Livni, will begin exchanges on preparations for the forthcoming talks.

Today's debate therefore offers us a welcome opportunity to call on the parties to engage in good faith in these new negotiations, which my delegation has consistently held are the only means to reach a lasting settlement to the conflict, which requires the establishment of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security within secure and internationally recognized borders. The two-State solution should not be an empty promise. It must be achieved because it embodies peace for the Middle East.

While we talk of the future, which we hope will be bright and prosperous, we must also address the present, which is hardly reassuring. Indeed, violence continues to rage and rocket fire on the south of Israel on 24 June and 11 July remind us that Islamist armed groups, operating with full impunity in the Gaza Strip, are far from interested in peace or negotiations. However, choosing violence has not helped to settle the conflict; on the contrary, it has made peace more remote. That is why we ask the leaders of Hamas to take

urgent steps to control extremist groups that refuse to renounce violence.

On the other side, the Israeli Government must end new settlement building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It should also abandon its project to build new housing in the northern West Bank. We also urge it to do more by lifting the blockade on the Gaza Strip, for merely softening measures is not enough to ultimately remedy the situation of poverty and precariousness experienced by Gazans.

My country is also concerned by the issue of Palestinian prisoners, who undoubtedly are another reason for the violence. While welcoming the announcement made by the Israeli authorities of the imminent increased release of some long-held prisoners, we urge them to do far more in that regard, given the large number of prisoners still in detention.

The question of Palestinian refugees remains an issue of major concern to my country. That question can be settled only as part of an overall solution to the conflict, which we very much wish to see. In that regard, we renew our congratulations to the United Nations for all of its efforts, through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to help those living on the margins.

The long history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has taught us that the path to peace is strewn with obstacles. We have also seen that every time positive steps are taken, acts of violence are carried out by extremists on both sides to undermine the efforts that have been made. Both camps have those who want peace and those fighting to maintain the status quo. That is why Israeli and Palestinian leaders must remain vigilant and show the world that they are firmly resolved to find a lasting solution to the world's oldest conflict. The international community should support them on the path to peace. The Quartet should also be involved in ensuring that the forthcoming negotiations can yield genuine results.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, the conflict has caused more than 95,000 deaths and almost destroyed the country's foundations. The killings and massacres, arrests and arbitrary detentions continue, and our concerns are amplified by the flight of the country's population. A generation of youth has been sacrificed, and the conflict has assumed sectarian dimensions, characterized by a confessional divide that makes us fear the worst for religious minorities. The killing on 23 June of a Catholic priest, François Murad, attributed to jihadist groups, gives us a glimpse of Syria's future if the parties persevere in believing in victory through arms.

The Council has failed to stop the carnage, but it can at least pressure the parties to negotiate for peace. To that end, it must work towards unity so as to speak with one voice. Clearly, dialogue is the only way out of the conflict, which is having negative and dangerous repercussions for neighbouring countries, particularly Lebanon, which is paying the heaviest price. Once again, we would like to support the Russian-United States initiative to hold the "Geneva II" conference, which should lead to the establishment of a transitional policy based on the Geneva communiqué dated 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex). We call for its implementation as soon as possible.

A political settlement undoubtedly remains the best path to end the conflict and to create a new, peaceful Syria, reconciled with itself.

Mr. Mehdiyev (Azerbaijan): Allow me at the outset to thank you, Madam, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing and the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their statements.

On the Middle East peace process, Azerbaijan commends and supports ongoing diplomatic efforts, particularly those undertaken by the United States, to revive the negotiations and to contribute to greater stability in the region. We are encouraged by the recent announcement of the establishment of a basis for the resumption of talks and by the decision of the parties to return to the negotiating table. We also note the continued interest of the original stakeholders and underline the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, which provides the necessary regional support for the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution. The Secretary-General has also stated that the United Nations will support any endeavour towards meaningful negotiations and to the achievement of a comprehensive peace in the region.

Needless to say, the situation of insecurity in the region has never required progress in the peace process as much as it does today. It is imperative that the parties demonstrate responsibility to sustaining international efforts towards achieving the two-State solution and

that they avoid actions that would risk undermining that objective. The parties must uphold their commitments to the 21 November 2012 ceasefire agreement and refrain from any action that would undermine it.

Settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory remain one of the biggest obstacles and threats to the peace process. As a matter of principle and law, Azerbaijan has consistently condemned and rejected settlement practices. Regardless of whether settlements are new or old, they are illegal under international law and must be ceased immediately and completely.

The economic, financial and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory requires continued international attention and assistance, particularly in order to ensure the unimpeded provision of humanitarian aid throughout the region.

On 11 June, Azerbaijan hosted a conference of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the establishment of an Islamic financial safety net in support of Palestine, and the donors conference in support of the city of Al-Quds. The States members of the OIC and international organizations attending the conference pledged to contribute to improving the Palestinian economy, health care and education and to the infrastructure projects of the city of Al-Quds.

Palestinian unity and reconciliation is another important issue to which we regularly refer. We support the ongoing efforts to that end under the leadership of President Abbas and express our hope that the May 2013 agreement between Fatah and Hamas to form a unity Government will be implemented within the agreed time frame.

Azerbaijan is deeply concerned about the continued destabilization, violence and widespread human rights violations in Syria. The conflict in Syria has inflicted extensive damage on the country and its people, as well as on the entire region. The regional implications of the crisis are evident not only in its humanitarian impact on the neighbouring countries but also in the participation of foreign elements in the conflict and in the increased military presence of such States in the immediate vicinity of military action.

Those factors and, above all, the deepening humanitarian disaster in Syria and beyond require, first and foremost, urgent action on the part of the international community with a view to bringing about a negotiated solution to the conflict. We fully support the Secretary-General's recent appeal to the parties in Syria and their supporters to focus on the search for a political solution, which remains the only way out of the crisis. We very much hope that the second Geneva conference on Syria will take place soon with the best chances of success. There can be no doubt that the failure of ongoing diplomatic efforts will further exacerbate the situation and will have catastrophic consequences, both inside and outside Syria.

Mrs. Perceval (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like, first of all, to commend you, Madam President, for having organizing this debate. I also thank Special Coordinator Serry for his detailed presentation. I express my respect to the Permanent Representative of Israel and my gratitude to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine for their important contributions.

This open debate is taking place at a moment of great uncertainty and upheaval, not only in the Middle East but for the entire world. A series of events has led to the interruption of the incipient and long-awaited democratic process in Egypt, and I would like to express my solidarity with the Egyptian people, especially with women and young people, who dream of a society built on freedom, solidarity and peace. Meanwhile, the violence in Syria is rapidly spreading to the whole region and political and religious leaders are increasingly employing sectarian rhetoric, with the potential and power to exacerbate existing tensions and generate further violence and atrocities on a large scale.

We have heard that in this climate of uncertainty and upheaval in the Middle East it is very difficult to open doors. Argentina believes otherwise. This very climate of increased tension and instability does not so much offer an favourable environment as it ethically and politically demands a viable solution. We believe today more than ever that it is both necessary and possible to restart the conversations while preserving existing gains towards the institutional construction of Palestine, ensuring the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and contributing to the long-term security of Israel. The solution to this conflict is, and will be, an important factor in the peace and stability of the region and the world.

We therefore commend the efforts of Secretary of State Kerry and welcome the announcement that the bases have been established for reopening dialogue

between the parties. That announcement reflects not only the intense work of the past four months but political commitment and deep knowledge of the parties and their leaders, who should now respond constructively and in good faith, proving that they are capable of guiding their Governments and people towards a peace agreement.

We also believe that this is not a matter of individual proposals and efforts, although we certainly value them as represented by Secretary of State Kerry. The comprehensive efforts of a single, well-intentioned individual are not enough to advance a peace process. There has to be a collective project, a project shared by the international community as a whole, that will remove the obstacles that stand in the way of the steps needed to reopen dialogue between the parties. The central elements of such an agreement already enjoy wide acceptance on the part of the international community, which makes it hard to understand why we continue to set traps for ourselves: two States, based on the borders of 4 June 1967, with an agreed exchange of land, Jerusalem as the future capital of both States, the necessary security arrangements and a just solution to the refugee question.

We need to resolve the situation and not simply insist that Israel should unconditionally and immediately bring to a complete halt all settlement activities because they constitute human rights violations and war crimes. The High Commissioner for Human Rights said as much earlier this year. In this case, time is not gold. Time is lives, time is freedom, time is democracy, time is peace. In reality, the truth — all truths — and law are never counterproductive. Humankind has learned that truth and respect for the law are the pathway to peace.

With regard to Syria, exactly one week ago (see S/PV.7000) the Council heard yet again tragic accounts of those in charge of the huge efforts to address the terrible consequences of the tragedy unfolding in that country, and a heart-rending description of the contempt of the different parties to the conflict for the most elementary tenets of international law, of human rights and of international humanitarian law.

The Human Rights Council has recently called for the status of the settlements to be clarified under the rule of law and international law, not only according to the International Court of Justice but also under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court.

Now, on the situation in Syria, I would like to mention what a Latin American writer said a few days ago, namely, that it is not a prisoner of necessity, but a prisoner of fear. Some do not sleep because of their anxiety that they do not have the things they do not have, while others do not sleep because they dread losing what they already have.

I would like to conclude by saying that there are only five issues that Argentina continues to support on the crisis in Syria.

First, the deliberate obstacles to access for humanitarian assistance that are still in place are violations of international law. They are unacceptable on both sides.

Secondly, war crimes, crimes against humanity and serious violations of human rights cannot go unpunished. We therefore reiterate that the Security Council must consider referring the situation to the International Criminal Court.

Thirdly, we insist that supplying weapons to the parties must stop. There is no doubt that weapons in Syria are being used to commit human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law. That shows that some speak of trust and commitment in connection with the second Geneva conference on Syria while, on the other hand, showing that they only believe in a militarized solution to the conflict. Brahimi said a few days ago:

(*spoke in English*):

"Arms do not make peace."

(*spoke in Spanish*):

That is not a revealed truth; it is a proven conviction.

Fourthly, the countries hosting Syrian refugees cannot by themselves face the burden imposed on them by the ongoing influx of individuals fleeing the conflict. The entire international community, United Nations agencies, must work for inclusion, for conditions for a dignified life for refugees.

Fifthly, the Security Council has failed. It has failed in its obligation to comply with the mandate entrusted to us in the Charter. For that reason, it is urgent for us to redouble our efforts to consolidate the understanding between Russia and the United States to convene the Geneva conference on Syria in order to find a way to

implement a political solution. We are what we do, but we are also what we do not do.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I thank Special Coordinator Serry for his briefing.

Obviously, the Middle East continues to experience very dangerous conflict and instability. The intensifying conflict in Syria and its destabilizing impact on countries like Lebanon and Jordan are a direct threat to wider peace and security. The political developments in Egypt are also of serious concern, creating both uncertainty for Egypt itself and wider implications for the region. It is vital for Egypt's stability and development that the transition back to a democratically elected Government is inclusive and transparent.

One very welcome and positive development is the agreement the Palestinians and the Israelis have reached on a basis for resuming direct final status negotiations. We warmly congratulate the United States for its leadership, in particular the perseverance and tireless efforts of Secretary of State Kerry. We also commend Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas. It is important that all Israelis and Palestinians support this effort. We congratulate the Arab League and encourage its continuing role in support of the peace process.

We recognize that the resumption of negotiations is a first step on what will be a difficult path towards a two-State solution. Both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas must now seize this historic opportunity and commit to negotiating in good faith, aiming to achieve a lasting peace, with a secure Israel living alongside an independent and viable Palestinian State. As we all know, there is no Plan B.

As a friend of the Palestinians, we encourage them to engage fully in the negotiation process. The path to Palestinian statehood lies in negotiations, not through United Nations resolutions nor in pursuing membership in international organizations. For negotiations to have any chance of success, conditions on the ground must remain stable and rocket attacks on Israel must cease. Equally, Israel must stop creating and expanding new settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Settlement activity is illegal and undermines confidence in the peace process.

As a friend of Israel, we can say that the only way to ensure the durability of a democratic State is through the creation of a viable Palestinian State. All of us in the international community must help sustain an environment conducive to peace talks. Support for the Palestinian economy will also remain fundamental.

Syria continues to descend into ever more brutal and widening conflict. Seven million Syrians — one-third of the population — need help. There are approximately five million internally displaced persons in the country. Over a third of housing has been destroyed, a third of the schools damaged. Thousands of civilians are trapped under siege in Homs and Aleppo and elsewhere. Almost 60 per cent of the hospitals are out of operation or severely damaged, and medical supplies are being systematically targeted to prevent their delivery. There are approximately two million refugees, as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres told us last week, having accumulated at a rate not seen since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Hundreds of thousands of other Syrians have informally sought shelter in neighbouring countries. Human rights abuses, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, are rampant and have gone unpunished.

Syria's neighbours — above all, Lebanon and Jordan — are at the breaking point. The humanitarian system itself is being stretched beyond its capacity. We urge all countries that can do so to support the humanitarian appeals for Syria and the region, which, when combined with direct appeals from Lebanon and Jordan, require $5.2 billion, making them the largest appeals in history.

Both Lebanon and Jordan require strong support politically from the international community. Lebanon faces internal violence. Hizbullah's overt involvement in Syria threatens Lebanon's policy of dissociation and the stability of the State. We reiterate our support for President Sleiman and the efforts of the Lebanese Armed Forces to maintain stability.

We encourage the early formation of a Lebanese Government to confront the challenges. We strongly endorse the Council's recent presidential statement in support of Lebanon and its institutions of State (S/PRST/2013/9).

Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bob Carr, visited Syrian refugees in the Beka'a Valley in May and was struck by the scale of the suffering and by the generosity of Lebanon in hosting so many fleeing from Syria. He had earlier visited refugees in Jordan. He announced a further $12 million increase in Australia's humanitarian response, bringing our

current contribution to $80 million, with substantially more to come shortly.

Lebanon and Jordan need strong support from the international community, going beyond the immediate humanitarian assistance to include broader recovery assistance. The pressures from refugees and displaced people on the essential services of the two countries are becoming untenable, and the pressures can only increase.

We are gravely concerned at the growing body of evidence that the Al-Assad regime has used chemical weapons. This week's visit to Damascus by the United Nations for talks on investigations is welcome, but talks alone do not address the serious allegations. Syria must grant full access for United Nations investigations into all allegations.

Clearly, the need for a political solution in Syria has never been greater, and Australia supports the central role of the United Nations in convening a second Geneva conference on political transition. We must not lose momentum in ending what has become the single biggest catastrophe of the new century.

We again repeat our call for the Council to live up to its responsibilities under the Charter — our responsibilities — and international expectations, and work harder to end the conflict, in order to pre-empt a broader regional threat to peace and security and to alleviate the terrible humanitarian disaster we face.

Most immediately, the humanitarian crisis demands that the Council consider what additional steps can be taken to meet the crisis. Australia remains prepared to work with others on this as a priority.

Mr. Kim Sook (Republic of Korea): I thank Special Coordinator Serry for his detailed briefing. I also appreciate the statements made by the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel.

The absence of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine has been one of the most significant conditions defining Middle East politics for the past three years. We therefore wholeheartedly welcome last week's announcement of the agreement establishing the basis for resuming talks. We highly commend the ongoing mediation efforts of the United States Government, as personified by the relentless engagement of Secretary of State John Kerry.

The international community has witnessed too many past failures, however, to be overly exulted by this news. In fact, there is no formula that has not been proposed to resolve the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian situation. The goal is not to simply resume the negotiation process, but to finish what has been begun. Both parties must therefore bring to the negotiating table their strongest commitments, along with the awareness that failed negotiations can worsen their common future.

Although the specific criteria of the upcoming talks are still unknown, it is a good sign that both Israel and Palestine are assuming serious and positive attitudes. We hope that the engagement of the Quartet and of regional organizations will be made in a manner that reinforces the efforts of the United States Government. That is undoubtedly a very difficult task, but as a revered Israeli politician once said, when doing business with extreme difficulty, if we do not believe in miracles, we are not realistic.

We have called on Israel to cease its settlement activities and its demolition of dwellings in Area C. We are also concerned over the occurrence of violent incidents between settlers and Palestinian residents in the West Bank. We sincerely hope that the resumed negotiations will eventually resolve those chronic issues. During the past week, clashes in the West Bank have noticeably diminished, and the restrictions on access into East Jerusalem have eased. Whatever the cause, we hope that this trend will lead to the successful launching of direct negotiations well beyond Ramadan.

At the same time, we must be mindful of the potential explosiveness of the underlying tensions. We strongly condemn the rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip. The leadership, along with the people of Israel and Palestine, must prove that those who bet on the failure of a lasting peace can never win.

Furthermore, we strongly condemn all firing across and within the area of separation adjacent to the Golan Heights. The Syrian crisis itself has already had wide-ranging negative effects on the region, but attacks that could spark full-scale clashes would give rise to a new level of violence. There is a potential risk that uncontrolled shelling may evolve into serious clashes if left unchecked. The Syrian regime must understand that it will be the first to suffer from an expanded regional war.

Last week's joint briefing (see S/PV.7000) by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was yet another grim reminder that the Syrian crisis remains headed towards even more catastrophic results. Humanitarian assistance cannot save Syria in the absence of a political solution. Nevertheless, we must continue our efforts to ensure humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people in such desperate need of help, especially those trapped amid the fighting or under siege.

The continuing systematic violence against women and children must come to an end. The world must prove that those who violate human rights and international humanitarian law will be brought to justice, no matter what it may take or how long. In that regard, my delegation once again calls for the referral of the Syrian situation to the International Criminal Court. We also look forward to the report of the Commission of Inquiry to the General Assembly.

Once again, we express our gratitude to the neighbouring countries who share borders with Syria and are hosting Syrian refugees. We understand the difficulties faced by those States that have closed or are tightly controlling their borders due to security reasons, but we call on them to re-open the borders on a humanitarian basis. The international community should answer the appeals of the neighbouring countries, implement its pledges and, together with the relevant international organizations, establish long-term assistance plans in a coordinated manner.

It is also deeply troubling that another negative impact of the Syrian crisis is an increase in hate speech, which is arousing sectarian tension and violence throughout the region. All regional leaders must exert greater efforts and positive influence to prevent such phenomena from growing.

With regard to the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, we welcome the visit of Mr. Åke Sellström and Ms. Angela Kane to Damascus. The Syrian Government should accept the modalities by which transparent investigations can be carried out according to the guidelines and procedures approved by the General Assembly. It is the position of the Republic of Korea that independent and impartial investigations should take place in all locations specified in allegations as soon as possible.

As Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos stated before the Council last week, "we are watching the destruction of not only a country, but also its people" (*S/PV.7000, p. 2*). We hope that the spirit of generosity of Ramadan will lead to the cessation of violence.

Mr. Gasana (Rwanda): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his informative and insightful briefing on the current situation in the Middle East. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

It is disheartening to see the Middle East riddled by raging armed conflicts, political impasse and dire humanitarian crises, from the collapse of negotiations on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the fully-fledged Syrian armed conflict, with its effects on all of Syria's neighbours, in particular Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

With regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict, we join in welcoming a new glimmer of hope in the peace process. We commend the tireless efforts of the United States Government through its Secretary of State, John Kerry, in bringing the Israelis and Palestinians to an agreement on the resumption of the peace talks.

We call on both parties to seize this unique opportunity and to make history for generations to come. We hope that those countries that may have influence on both parties will redouble their efforts to encourage Israel and Palestine to come to the negotiating table with a sense of flexibility and open-mindedness. In that context, however, it is important that both sides refrain from any activities that may undermine a two-State solution.

In Gaza, the calm brokered by Egypt in November 2011 has largely held but remains fragile. We condemn the recent rocket attacks into Israel during the month of June. We express our appreciation to the Israeli Government for allowing Palestinian fishermen to fish within six nautical miles of the Gaza shore, extended from the previous three-mile limit. We encourage the Government of Israel to add further miles as a confidence-building measure that could not only improve the livelihood of Palestinians but also improve the relationships between Palestine and the State of Israel.

The situation in Syria remains deeply alarming, as the violence escalates. The humanitarian crisis continues

to worsen, with a third of the Syrian people now in need of urgent assistance and a quarter of them displaced. Syria's neighbours, as generous and hospitable as they are, have reached their limits in hosting the now over 1.8 million registered refugees. While we recognize the impact on host countries, we stress the importance of keeping borders open for refugees fleeing violence, consistent with international humanitarian obligations.

We were alarmed by the recent report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry to Syria (A/HRC/23/58), released last month, and we express deep concern at the continued human rights violations, mass destruction, sexual violence, arbitrary detention and reported accounts of murder and torture, in violation of international humanitarian law. We wish to send a clear signal to all those who are involved in committing crimes that they will be held accountable.

We regret to see that the Security Council, whose primary responsibility is to maintain international peace and security, has so far failed to take the necessary action aimed at saving the Syrian people. The militarization of the conflict in Syria will only accelerate the killings and violence and the emergence of Al-Qaida-linked groups. For Rwanda, the conflict will be ended only through a comprehensive and inclusive political process. We reiterate our support to Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, and commend the work he has done for a peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis.

In the same spirit, we look forward to the "Geneva II" conference, and we encourage both the United States and the Russian Federation to agree on the pending issues, so as to allow for the convening of the conference as soon as possible.

Regarding Lebanon, it is clear that the war in Syria, including the unprecedented refugee crisis, is putting a growing strain on the Lebanese economy, political dynamics and security. The current humanitarian crisis and its long-term implications, as well as the continuing political deadlock, requires close international attention and support.

Lebanon has seen repeated incidents of shelling from Syria into Lebanese territory, and Syrian armed groups have carried out attacks against the Syrian armed forces from Lebanese soil. In that regard, we are deeply concerned at the increased involvement of foreign fighters in Syria, notably the Lebanese Hizbullah. We reiterate our call to the Lebanese parties to refrain from taking part in the Syrian conflict, in accordance with the disassociation policy and the Baabda Declaration.

In conclusion, Madam President, let me reiterate our conviction that a stable and peaceful Middle East, with nations living side by side in harmony, is an objective that we can achieve should all parties commit to lay down their arms and resolve to settle their differences politically, with a view to exploring the tremendous opportunities offered by the Middle East, a region with huge economic potential. It is therefore imperative for the countries of the region, the Security Council and other stakeholders to work collectively to preserve stability and contribute to laying peaceful foundations for a better future in the Middle East, to which so many of its peoples aspire.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): We thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his briefing. We have attentively listened to the statements of Palestine and Israel.

After three years of stalemate, we have heard good news from the Middle East. Palestinians and Israelis will return to direct peace talks. What is more, the talks will start soon, and they will not be talks about talks but about the issues hampering the peace process.

We congratulate United States Secretary of State John Kerry for his resolute statesmanship. Despite warnings of failure, Mr. Kerry persevered in his diplomacy and persuaded the two sides to resume negotiations. The parties cannot afford to procrastinate. The window for a two-State solution is narrow, one to two years. There is an urgency to press ahead with the peace process. Palestine and Israel have welcomed the resumption of talks. President Mahmoud Abbas has said that agreement on certain principles has led to the decision to resume talks. Prime Minister Netanyahu has characterized the resumption of the peace process as a vital strategic interest. The Middle East Quartet has called this a huge achievement. Both sides are inclined to take concrete steps and show some flexibility. We welcome the announcement about the release of Palestinian prisoners.

There are two other core concerns: a halt to the construction of settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, and Israel's recognition of the pre-1967 borders and using them as a baseline for negotiations.

The best way to give those talks a chance is to keep them away from the public glare to the extent possible. Critics and cynics are already predicting the failure of the renewed engagement. Rumours and refutations continue to stalk the peace process. It is therefore important to salvage this initiative.

But there is no cause for euphoria either. The road ahead is rough and rugged, and there is no panacea or shortcut. The agreement to resume talks is still being finalized, yet this first step is better than a complete hiatus. For success, the two sides should ensure a measured pace for engagement.

Both sides should work towards an atmosphere conducive to negotiations. Easing the blockade on Gaza will be a huge confidence-building measure and also provide relief to the population.

It became evident that without the intercession of a third influential party, the deadlock on talks would not have been broken. It is therefore imperative that the Security Council, the Quartet and regional organizations support the peace process to give it broader ownership. We applaud the ambitious call made by Mr. Serry to achieve tangible progress by the next session of the General Assembly.

On the eve of these negotiations, we reiterate that the only viable solution for the Palestine-Israel conflict is the creation of an independent, sustainable and contiguous State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. Alternatives to this proposed solution are not likely to work.

For peace in the region, Israel must vacate Lebanese lands and the Syrian Golan. The sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon must be respected.

As we meet in this Chamber, Syria is burning. The bloodshed continues. Guns are not going to win the war, and, as Mr. Brahimi said, arms will not make peace. The Council and the international community should take steps to stop arms supplies to all sides and bring the Syrian Government and opposition representatives to Geneva for talks that will lead to a political solution and national reconciliation.

The dates for the Geneva conference have been slipping, from June to July and now to September, and even beyond, because each side wants to demonstrate military superiority before moving to the negotiating table. More arms will lead only to more bloodshed, not to peace. We believe that in this war there will be no victors, because Syrian is killing Syrian. The whole Syrian nation is suffering. A meltdown in Syria will fracture the entire region. Pakistan believes that all hurdles to the Geneva conference should be removed as soon as possible. All countries with interest and influence, including those in the region, should participate in the talks for a viable and enduring peace.

We welcome the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire during Ramadan. It has not been heeded, but it still has a symbolic value. We also welcome the visit to Damascus this week of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Angela Kane, and the head of the United Nations mission to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Åke Sellström. We call on all sides to provide the team will full access in order to enable it to complete its task.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Robert Serry, for his very relevant briefing and his continued commitment to peace in the Middle East. I would also like to thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

Luxembourg associates itself fully with the statement to be delivered later in this debate by the observer of the European Union.

My remarks will focus on the Middle East peace process and Syria.

For month after month we have reiterated the urgent need to see the emergence of a contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living in peace and security side by side with Israel. The announcement, on 19 July, of an agreement in principle to relaunch direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians is, at last, a significant step forward on that path. As others have before me, I would like to commend the commitment and determination of the United States Secretary of State. My Minister had the opportunity yesterday to congratulate Mr. John Kerry personally during his exchange of views with the European Ministers for Foreign Affairs. We also commend the political courage and sense of responsibility shown by the Israeli and Palestinian authorities in agreeing to return to the negotiating table.

We all know that this initiative may be the last chance; we cannot let it go by. The consequences would be tragic. The peace talks must now resume, and the way to take the steps that will lead to the implementation of a two-State solution must be determined on a basis of clear parameters and a timetable that, we hope, will enable conclusions to be reached within a reasonable space of time. The time has come to take the necessary difficult and historic decisions that coincide with a vision of the long-term interests of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

With its European Union partners, Luxembourg is ready to continue to contribute actively to the efforts under way, in close cooperation with the key stakeholders, the Quartet and the countries of the region. There can be no security in Israel without a contiguous and viable Palestinian State, and no security in the region without peace in every country in the Middle East.

I now turn to Syria. The use of missiles and cluster bombs, the possible use of chemical weapons, the systematic imposition of states of siege, forced displacements, torture, sexual violence, violations and abuse against children, 100,000 deaths — perhaps by now 150,000 — the toll after more than two years of brutal repression makes the blood run cold. Human rights in Syria are being trampled on. Violations of international humanitarian law are multiplying. The list of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed daily continues to lengthen. In the face of such horror, I will never tire of repeating here that the Security Council should refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Last week, at my delegation's request, the Security Council had the opportunity to hear harrowing revelations of the humanitarian situation in Syria and the countries of the region affected by the crisis there (see S/PV.7000). What is there to say, other than that the distress of the Syrian people has reached unimaginable proportions? There are 6.8 million Syrians in need of aid and 1.8 million who have fled their country. More than half of those affected are children. Regardless of the political efforts being made — specifically the Russian-American initiataive for the holding of the "Geneva II" conference — which we support and which, we hope, will enable an eventual political solution to the conflict to be found, it is the Council's duty to concern itself with urgent needs and the humanitarian imperative. It is high time to show solidarity with the Syrian people. It is high time to consider the best way to respond to the appeals of Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos. As we see it, it is vital that the Security Council reinforce the demands of the humanitarian actors on the parties to the Syrian conflict by addressing issues related to bureaucratic obstacles, transporting medical supplies, opening routes for humanitarian access and trans-border and front-line access for the affected populations.

The same applies to support for Syria's neighbours, which, as has been highlighted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Antonio Guterres, are dealing with a influx of refugees without precedent since the genocide in Rwanda. We simply cannot be content to thank those neighbouring countries for their generosity and continue to approach this issue as if it were one of a mere temporary humanitarian emergency. Even if a political solution in Syria were to emerge tomorrow, it would still be the case that the Syrian crisis is going to have a long-term impact on its neighbours, particularly Lebanon. The international community must come up with an adequate response to it.

I venture to hope that, if only on humanitarian issues, the Council will be able to emerge from its silence and take up its responsibilities.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

The frequency with which we address this topic has often been questioned within the Security Council. However, the current situation in the region is so volatile and changeable, and has such enormous implications, that it must be acknowledged that frequent monitoring is justified. The first rapture with which the Arab Spring was received in the Chamber only a little more than a year ago is now seasoned with a dose of scepticism about how easy or difficult we can expect the transition to be from authoritarian Governments towards more democratic, participative, pluralistic and open systems. The recent events in Egypt are but one testimony to that fact. At the same time, increasing sectarian tensions and their frequent spillover into violence are matters of growing concern, for obvious reasons.

But now is not the moment to discuss the overall situation. I shall therefore focus on the two topics that have been the principal object of our attention — first the situation in Syria, and secondly the Middle East peace process. They are radically different situations,

but at this point they have one thing in common, namely, the recognition that the road towards reconciliation begins by bringing the conflicting parties to the table to talk to each other, and, eventually, to seek agreement through direct negotiations. That is the logic behind the initiative known as "Geneva II", and underlies the imperative that it must be the parties directly affected — Israel and Palestine — that define the path that will lead to the two-State solution, allowing them to live in peace behind secure borders.

I turn now to the situation in Syria, which is a human tragedy of immense proportions and a source of ongoing frustration for my delegation. Clearly, the Security Council has failed to meet its basic purpose, first, to avoid and then to put an end to the spiral of violence that has destroyed lives, communities and the cultural legacy of millennia. The anxious search for a negotiated and peaceful political solution has not met with success. The danger that the crisis will spread to neighbouring countries is growing, and the humanitarian cost has reached unimaginable levels.

In the context of this sombre scenario, our only hope, which is fading with time, lies in the attempts of the United States, the Russian Federation and the Secretariat to establish the basis for the holding of a conference that could trigger a dialogue and negotiation between the parties. We fervently want such a conference to take place as soon as possible and, above all, the parties to commit themselves to seeking a definitive solution to the conflict, which would require a transitional authority. We do not believe that conditions should be set for the participation in such a gathering or preclude any possible outcome.

We also reiterate our admiration and respect for the Governments of Jordan and Lebanon, both of which, despite the enormous pressure they are enduring, have maintained their borders open to the refugees from the Syrian conflict. They more than deserve the support of the international community.

As regards the peace process in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, steps have been taken in recent months suggesting that it may still be possible to reach a mutual agreement between the parties and to salvage the two-State solution. The bases that could lead to renewed talks have recently been agreed to in the context of the diplomatic initiative of the Secretary of State of the United States, and supported, we trust, by the Quartet, the League of Arab States and the European Union. The involvement of other actors also demonstrates the sense of urgency with which a search for a definitive solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine is being pursued. We hope that both parties can show the leadership and responsibility necessary to continue their commitment to the peace process. We believe that the involvement of the Quartet in this initiative is essential.

As we have done on previous occasions, we maintain our position that both parties must avoid any act that jeopardizes the prospects of a peaceful solution to the conflict. Such acts only undermine any prospect that both peoples can live in peace and security. We believe that the construction of new or the expansion of existing settlements falls within this category and constitutes a violation of international law. Naturally, the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory must cease totally. At the same time, we hope that in the short term the economic restrictions being placed on the Gaza Strip will be reduced, since they undercut any prospects of progress.

Finally, we believe that the international community, through the United Nations, is duty-bound to condemn all and any violation that may undermine the peace process. The parties involved cannot be expected to act responsibly when the international community ignores flagrant violations committed by either.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Serry for his comprehensive briefing on the peace process in the Middle East, including Palestine.

Today's debate takes place in critical circumstances, given the efforts of Mr. Kerry, under the auspices of the United States Administration, to revive negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. These efforts have led to an agreement in principle to relaunch the peace process, which has been frozen for more than three years.

It is no secret that I attend this meeting in the personal hope of hearing a new statement of optimism concerning the prospects for resumed negotiations that are focused on success and a refusal to blame others for failure. Morocco has acknowledged and supported the United States initiative, and today we place great hope in it, in the light of the circumstances surrounding a possible resumption of serious negotiations with a view to reaching a comprehensive and just peace based on a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict that will

guarantee Israel's withdrawal from the Arab territories it has occupied since 1967, and the establishment of a Palestinian State with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Everyone here knows that the Arab and Palestinian side has demonstrated staunch political resolve and responsibility towards achieving peace in the Middle East. They have contributed to crystallizing an Arab initiative known to be open, courageous and peaceful, as affirmed in Washington, D.C., by the Arab ministerial committee. We hope that Israel will join this dynamism, contribute to its progress, and reverse the intensification of its occupation with a view towards achieving the two-State solution.

The United States initiative has opened a window of change that may be the last. The two parties must therefore embrace it with a view to resuming negotiations, building on prior achievements to bring the two sides closer together. We hope that both parties will demonstrate strong and determined political will to prepare for and resume the negotiations, and avoid any actions that could impede them.

The ongoing occupation and its daily repercussions, as well as the siege imposed on the Palestinian people, generate violence and radicalism and fuel hatred, thereby undermining any hope for peace. The construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, run counter to the principle of negotiations and also serve to undermine the peace process. That applies as well to Israeli measures in the Holy City of Jerusalem and to the repeated attempts to Judaize the city and change its character as a city of coexistence among the three divine religions. Given his responsibilities as Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, His Majesty the King of Morocco has condemned those measures and called upon the Council to ensure respect by Israel of the status of Jerusalem and to avoid negatively impacting Christian and Muslim holy sites.

The preparations for the negotiations must be coupled with good-faith steps that are conducive to the success of such negotiations. Most important among them are the lifting the blockade of the Palestinians in Gaza, who are part and parcel of the Palestinian people, and the release of Palestinian prisoners. The unjust blockade that has for years been imposed by Israel against Gaza must be lifted. The siege serves to deny Palestinians their dignity and basic human rights. In the current circumstances, achieving Palestinian national reconciliation is a necessity that must be met, for it will serve the interests of the Palestinian people as a whole and strengthen their negotiating position.

Sixty-five years since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), whereby the United Nations called for the establishment of two States, five wars have taken place, from which all peoples have suffered. The Palestinian people suffered and paid a price: displacement and the denial of their fundamental freedoms and human rights. Achieving the two-State solution makes it necessary for both parties to find a common vision. Such a vision must exclude narrow interests and must take into consideration the shared interests of both States, so as to achieve a genuine, just and forward-looking peace in the region.

To that end, it is necessary that the international community abide by its commitments towards Arabs and Palestinians, so as to fulfil the promises made with regard to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and enabling Syria and Lebanon regain their occupied territory. In that way, all the countries of the region will be able to enjoy stability and peace and be able to begin a new chapter of cooperation. We are convinced that any progress in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will serve the interests of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples alike. That will also contribute to restoring stability and security for all States of the Middle East region.

That stability also requires that there be an immediate halt to violence and finding a way out of the political crisis for which the brotherly people of Syria are paying the price. The increasing number of victims of that tragedy, as well as the resulting painful humanitarian situation, makes the Syrian parties responsible for the unity of their country. At the same time, it is unacceptable for the Council to remain silent in the light of the worsening crisis in Syria. That silence is counter to its important and historic responsibility enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The convening of the "Geneva II" conference is a moral, political and human duty for all those with influence on the Syrian parties. We sincerely hope that everyone will assume their responsibilities.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation welcomes the update provided by United States Secretary of State John Kerry at the press conference held in Amman on 19 July as to the agreement in principle to launch Palestinian-

Israeli negotiations on the final status of the Palestinian territories. We welcome the planned contacts to be held in Washington, D.C., between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators to develop a formula for renewing the talks. We hope that, in future, the parties will shoulder their full responsibilities towards their peoples. Only they can, and should, agree on the parameters of a future Palestinian-Israeli settlement based on the well-known legal basis, including the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, the decision of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators and earlier agreements.

At this extremely important stage, both sides must refrain from unilateral actions and take reciprocal steps to establish a favourable atmosphere to reinvigorate the talks. Confidence-building measures by both sides are extremely important.

The arrangements that have been reached make more relevant the convening of a meeting of the Quartet, which continues to be the recognized international mechanism agreed upon by the Security Council to help achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Middle East situation. The Quartet should play a leading role in supporting the peace process. The main purpose of such a meeting should be to issue a message of unified support in providing potential assistance to Palestinians and Israelis in the extremely important and responsible task of achieving a final settlement and ending this protracted conflict.

We believe that Arab countries should be more involved in peacekeeping efforts. In that context, we would like to reiterate our recent proposal to invite a delegation from the League of Arab States to the next Quartet ministerial meeting to promote the Arab Peace Initiative.

We continue to believe that overcoming the internal Palestinian divide on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform and the Arab Peace Initiative will help to achieve peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

Without achieving Palestinian national unity, reaching a comprehensive Palestinian-Israeli settlement, or even strengthening its outcome, will not be possible. The relevance of inter-Palestinian reconciliation was a particular point of focus during last week's visit to Moscow by Fatah member Nabil Shaath.

Efforts to overcome the deadlock in the Middle East peace process were discussed in Moscow at the beginning of July, including with Israeli Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni, who is the Government Minister responsible for talks with the Palestinians. The commitment to the two-State solution was underscored, which is the only way to meet the genuine aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Any delay in that regard is unacceptable.

We are convinced that progress towards a lasting settlement to such a key regional issue as that of Palestine will have a beneficial impact on the entire situation in the region, whose countries continue to undergo fundamental transformations.

The tragic events in Syria are of great concern to all of us. Terrorism, humanitarian challenges, aftershocks of the crisis in neighbouring countries, violations of human rights and the worsening ethnic and sectarian strife are all very dangerous threats with regard to outbreaks of violence in the country. They will only increase so long as a solution to the Syrian crisis is put off. It is well known that such a solution must be political and be achieved solely in the framework of a comprehensive intra-Syrian dialogue based on unconditional respect for the sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, as stated in the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) of 30 June 2012. All of our efforts should support the main goals of swiftly ending all violence and launching the transition process in order to restore the country and eliminate hostilities and blockades and meet the humanitarian needs of the people.

The Russian Federation is convinced that a genuine path to those objectives will be facilitated by the early implementation of the Russian-American initiative of 7 May on the convening of an international conference on Syria without prior conditions and aimed at the full and comprehensive implementation of the Geneva communiqué. One of the main themes of that event should be to consolidate the efforts of both the Government and the opposition to expel terrorists and extremists from the country. It is important that all constructive opposition groups take part in the talks and that the Syrian Government be willing to talk with them, having already announced support for the ideas of the conference.

It is unfortunate, however, that a significant number of opponents of the central authority, including representatives of the Syrian National Coalition, are not yet ready to participate in the conference. Nevertheless, we trust that the collective efforts of the international community to swiftly convene the second Geneva conference will continue.

Like other members of the Council, we are extremely concerned about the risk of internal destabilization in Lebanon as a result of the Syrian crisis and related to the Shiite-Sunni confrontation, as well as social imbalances in the State's ethnic and religious structures — and all that against the backdrop of the increasing flow of refugees. To safeguard the country from those dangerous scenarios, all Lebanese political forces must show full responsibility, ensure a broad national dialogue and independently find a common denominator on the parameters for a political process, including by forming a Government and holding elections.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, Mr. Riyad Mansour, and the Permanent Representative of Israel, Mr. Ron Proser, for their statements.

The Middle East is being rocked by two crises that urgently require a resolute response from the international community. First, on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, my delegation has stated on numerous occasions that the two-State solution represents the only fair and lasting solution to the conflict. In 2013, the only way to ensure sustainability is to achieve it. In that context, we welcome the agreement in principle — thanks to the efforts of the American Secretary of State — to resume Israeli-Palestinian talks. We also welcome the sense of responsibility demonstrated by the authorities of both sides.

The process calls for the parties' commitment to resume direct, credible negotiations without preconditions. The alternative is easy: either 2013 will see the launch of meaningful negotiations leading to a final agreement on all of the issues, or 2013 may well see slip away this final opportunity to establish peace through a viable, sovereign, independent, contiguous Palestinian State, living in peace and security within recognized borders, side by side with the State of Israel, with Jerusalem as the capital of two States.

The process calls also for a political environment conducive to the negotiations. In particular, that requires establishing trust in order to dispel the mindset of mistrust between the parties.

In that context, we are concerned about the construction of new settlements, carried out in violation of international law, which will only complicate the launch of negotiations. That is why the European Union decided to align its laws with international law and to recall that might does not make right.

A change with respect to the Gaza Strip and lifting the blockade are also imperative to strengthen support for peace among a population that today lives under the exclusive yoke of Hamas. That must be done in respect for Israel's security. In that regard, France has firmly condemned the rocket attacks and recalls its commitment to strict observance of the truce.

As for the Palestinian Authority, we hope that it will use its new status in the United Nations constructively.

To conclude with respect to the peace process, I would like to again emphasize my country's readiness to contribute to a final settlement, in particular with its European partners, to facilitate negotiations and to participate, when the time comes, in implementing a peace agreement.

The year 2013 must also see the liberation of the Syrian people. The situation is tragic. Last week, Ms. Amos, Mr. Guterres and Mr. Šimonović again described the suffering of the Syrian people to the Council (see S/PV.7000). The statistics are horrific. The human toll since the start of the crisis is nearly 100,000 victims, a majority of whom are civilians, as well as tens of thousands of disappeared individuals. There are 1.8 million refugees, and 6.8 million people require humanitarian assistance. Attacks carried out in Al-Qusayr, Aleppo and Homs show that the regime has continued to ramp up its military attacks against its own people and pursues massive shelling in residential areas.

The regime knows no limits in its choice of weapons. It is using cluster munitions and incendiary bombs. A growing number of information sources have indicated that the regime continues to use chemical weapons, including sarin gas, which constitutes a war crime.

We call on Syria to authorize unimpeded access to the United Nations Independent International

Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic to investigate the allegations and incidents of the use of chemical weapons. We are awaiting the results of the commission's visit to Damascus this week.

It is high time for the Council to take the measures necessary to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people, the primary and overwhelming responsibility for which lies with the Al-Assad regime. Those measures are familiar to all: first, a referral to the International Criminal Court to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by all parties in Syria; secondly, increased humanitarian action to enable unimpeded access to all populations who need it. Ms. Amos identified in the Council a list of measures necessary to meet the needs of Syria. Based on that, the Council should send a clear, unanimous message on the application of international humanitarian law and the need for the regime to authorize humanitarian access throughout the country and to the Syrian population. Thirdly, a political transition is necessary. We support international efforts, particularly those led by Russia and the United States, for a political solution in Syria that embodies the principles of a political transition, based on the first part of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), namely, the transfer of the executive powers to a transitional Government.

For our part, we will continue to work on structuring the opposition. The broadening of the Syrian National Coalition and the election of a new president represent important decisions. The Coalition is also strengthening its status as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people and is pursuing its steps to restructure and to unite.

We call upon the international community to support the only approach capable of leading to a political transition. We have called for a credible interlocutor, and we have one — who is recognized by the League of Arab States and by the vast majority of the international community — working to form a Government and to effectively unite the various sectors of Syrian society.

I will make a final comment on Lebanon, which is caught in the middle of the storm. France welcomes the unanimous support expressed by the Council for Lebanon on 10 July. The presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/9), adopted on France's initiative, made clear the international community's unanimous commitment to the sovereignty, integrity, independence and stability of Lebanon.

As the effects of the Syrian crisis are increasingly felt in Lebanon, it is important to reiterate our collective support for Lebanese State institutions, which are the guarantors of stability in the country, and first and foremost to President Sleiman and to the Lebanese Armed Forces, which today courageously uphold the dissociation policy. We must ensure that Lebanon is not drawn into the Syrian conflict.

Today we are witnessing a region on the brink of toppling because of the Syrian crisis, the burden of refugees and the radical terrorism proliferating throughout the Syrian charnel house. Doing nothing to resolve the crisis in Syria would be to abandon that strategic region for world peace and security to decades of chaos that will not remain confined to the Middle East.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Robert Serry for his briefing this morning and the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

The Government of the United Kingdom warmly welcomes United States Secretary of State Kerry's 19 July announcement that Israel and the Palestinians have reached an agreement that establishes the basis for resuming direct final status negotiations. We pay tribute to the efforts of Secretary Kerry and his team and commend the leadership shown by both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas. The United Kingdom stands ready to do all that we can over the coming months to support the parties and the United States in their efforts to achieve a lasting peace for the Israeli and Palestinian people.

The European Union set out clearly its full support for United States efforts at yesterday's Foreign Affairs Council. There was also a vital role for Arab States to build on the constructive steps taken so far to reiterate the strategic importance of the Arab Peace Initiative. Friday's announcement is, of course, only a beginning, not an end. We welcome the clear commitment of Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to a two-State solution and to working to achieve peace for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Now more than ever it is vital that both show bold and decisive leadership. With the new momentum, the Israeli and Palestinian people must be able to trust that progress is possible. That would

be undermined by a repeat of recent events, such as further settlement announcements, the use of live fire and demonstrations by the Israeli Defense Forces, and rockets shot from Gaza into Israel. We urge all sides to exercise restraint and to look forward.

As talks resume, we should not forget Gaza. Gaza must be an integral part of any two-State solution. As our Minister for the Middle East saw last month, for ordinary Gazans the Strip remains a desperately difficult place in which to live. In the heat of summer, Gazans face very poor living conditions, including regular and sustained power cuts. It will be important for Gaza to benefit fully from any economic package that is being prepared to accompany the political track, including the easing of Israeli restrictions on movements of goods and people. The United Kingdom believes that an improved economy is not only essential for the people, including the children of Gaza, but firmly in Israel's own security interests.

Current United States efforts and the strong commitment shown by the parties themselves reflect the best chance in many years of securing peace. We must all unite to reach our shared goal of a negotiated two-State solution, where a safe and secure Israel can live in peace with an independent and viable Palestinian State.

Turning to Syria, it was with great dismay that we heard Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos's briefing before the Council last week. It is truly shocking that more than 6 million people require humanitarian assistance and that 4 million people are no longer able to meet their basic food needs. Yet the Al-Assad regime continues to prevent the United Nations from delivering aid effectively inside Syria. With the death toll now well over 100,000, the situation in Syria gets worse by the day. Since last July, an average of nearly 200 people have been killed every 24 hours. What started off as peaceful protests over two years ago has become a protracted conflict waged by a murderous regime, aided and abetted by Hizbullah and Iran. The Al-Assad regime has continued to ramp up its brutal military offensive over recent months, as witnessed today in Homs, where thousands of innocent civilians are currently trapped in their homes with limited access to food, water or electricity.

The countries of the region have already provided sanctuary to 1.7 million Syrians. More will come. We urge all neighbouring countries to keep their borders open for Syrians to escape the tragic and dangerous situation they are facing at home. In response, the United Kingdom has doubled its support for humanitarian assistance, bringing the total to over $500 million, including support for Syrian refugees and host communities in Jordan and Lebanon. The Group of Eight (G-8) countries last month committed over $1.5 billion, yet the United Nations $5.2 billion Syria appeal for 2013 is only 35 per cent funded. The needs for aid in Syria will, sadly, only grow. Without help, Lebanon and Jordan risk being destabilized. Member States need to contribute more and encourage others to do more now and in the long term.

The continuing deterioration of the human rights situation is also of grave concern. The independent international commission of inquiry's latest report found that the conflict had reached new levels of brutality. War crimes, crimes against humanity and gross human rights violations continue at a frightening rate. We remain at the forefront of the international community in calling for full accountability for all those responsible for human rights violations and abuses. The Council should refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court without delay.

There is a growing body of limited but persuasive information showing that the regime has used and continues to use chemical weapons, including sarin gas. The use of chemical weapons is a war crime. We call on Syria to allow the United Nations unfettered access to investigate incidents of chemical weapons use in Syria.

On 17 June, the G-8 reaffirmed support for a second conference in Geneva, leading to the creation of a transitional governing body with full executive powers. Yet the regime's offensive of recent weeks has made it even harder for this conference to take place. We continue to support the expanded Syrian National Coalition and its new President Ahmed Assi Al-Jarba. The coalition remains the most legitimate and credible representative of the Syrian people. It has made clear its commitment to a future democratic Syria in which the rights of all Syrians are respected. We must not conflate this moderate opposition with terrorist groups. We must not accept what Al-Assad wants us to believe — that the only alternative to his brutal regime is extremists and terrorists. There are millions of Syrians who want a peaceful and democratic future and legitimate forces that are fighting for their interests. We should be on their side.

Despite our differences, the Council shares some fundamental aims: to end the conflict, to stop Syria fragmenting, to let the people decide who governs them, and to prevent the growth of violent extremism. As a Council, we need to recommit to working with the parties in a meaningful way towards a viable political settlement, based on last year's Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex).

Mr. Wang Min (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing. We have also listened attentively to the statements made by the observer of the Observer State of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

At present, the situation in the Middle East remains complex and fragile. The Palestinian-Israeli issue is at the core of concerns in the Middle East, bearing on the overall situation in the region, to which dialogue and negotiation represent the only viable solution. Recently, thanks to the efforts of all parties, a significant opportunity exists for direct talks between Palestine and Israel. China welcomes the prospects of a resumption of peace talks and appreciates the parties' efforts in that direction. It is our hope that Palestine and Israel will overcome difficulties, move closer towards each other and try to achieve substantive progress as soon as possible.

China has consistently maintained that, through peace talks between Palestine and Israel, an independent State of Palestine can be established with complete sovereignty, based on the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, whereby the two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security, can facilitate peace and stability in the Middle East. A step-by-step solution to the Palestinian-Israeli issue is needed. The immediate priority is to take effective measures to halt all settlement activities, stop acts of violence targeting innocent civilians, lift the Gaza blockade and properly address the issue of Palestinian detainees.

Meanwhile, the international community needs to scale up its support for Palestine in order to facilitate its economic development and job creation. That will help ease the suffering of the Palestinian people and enhance their confidence in the peace process. China supports a greater role for the United Nations, especially the Security Council, in facilitating the unanimous support of the international community for the peace process in the Middle East.

China firmly supports the Palestinian people in their just cause for the restoration of their legitimate national rights and has been actively promoting the peace process. Last May, China invited leaders of both Palestine and Israel to visit China with a focus on peace facilitation. China put forward a four-point proposal on the solution to the question of Palestine, emphasizing: the need to maintain the right direction of independent statehood for Palestine, living side by side in peace with Israel; the need to regard peace negotiations as the only viable way out for peace; the need to adhere to the principle of land for peace; and the need for the international community to provide guarantees for taking the peace process forward.

To implement that four-point proposal, the Chinese Government hosted the United Nations International Meeting in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process last year in Beijing, whereby the efforts of the international community to facilitate the peace process gathered momentum. China stands ready to continue to work with the international community to play a constructive role for the early achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

A political solution is the only way out of the Syrian conflict. China welcomes all initiatives and efforts that will help stop the violence in Syria and facilitate a political solution to the Syrian conflict. We call on the Syrian parties to implement the Geneva communiqué of the Action Group, achieve a ceasefire and halt violence without delay, actively respond to the initiative for a Geneva conference on Syria and start a political dialogue as soon as possible.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I thank Special Coordinator Serry for his briefing.

I will begin with Middle East peace before turning to Syria and Lebanon.

The United States is deeply committed to a just and lasting peace, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security. That is why Secretary of State Kerry has made repeated visits to the region and has focused so heavily on that effort. Last week, after his sixth trip to the region as Secretary, he was able to announce that the parties had reached an agreement that establishes a basis for resuming direct final status negotiations. He also stressed that the agreement was

in the process of being formalized and that in the meantime none of the parties would be making public comments about the negotiations, so as to improve the likelihood that the talks could indeed succeed.

As Secretary Kerry noted, everyone is aware that the process will not be easy, and no one believes that the long-standing differences between the parties can be resolved overnight or just wiped away. We know that the challenges require some very tough choices in the days ahead.

Today, however, we are hopeful, because the representatives of two proud people have decided that the difficult road ahead is worth traveling and that the daunting challenges we face are worth tackling. So they have courageously recognized that in order for Israelis and Palestinians to live together side by side in peace and security, they must begin by sitting at the table together in direct talks.

It is important to note that that diplomatic effort would not have been possible without strong international support. The Arab Peace Initiative follow-up committee, the Quartet envoys and many others played a vital role in supporting the resumptions of negotiations. The Secretary-General, European partners and others around the world also weighed in with strong statements of support. We should now continue to urge all sides to avoid taking unilateral actions, including steps at the United Nations. Our shared objective at this critical moment must be to build the trust and confidence necessary for a lasting peace.

In that regard, the United States position remains that General Assembly resolution 67/19 did not establish that Palestine is a State. The United States is committed to helping bring about a viable Palestinian State through bilateral negotiations with their Israeli counterparts. That is the only real path to genuine statehood for the Palestinian people, as repeatedly affirmed by both sides and endorsed by the international community.

In the end, those most responsible for that process are the parties themselves. We applaud the courageous leadership shown by President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu in taking that step forward. As the parties work through the complicated issues they face, we should encourage them with all possible support.

Turning to Syria, the United States continues to believe that the only sustainable outcome to the conflict is through a political solution based on the Geneva Action Group for Syria communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), which clearly calls for a transitional governing body with full executive powers chosen by mutual consent. We continue to work towards that end. In that regard, we welcome the election of Syrian opposition coalition President Ahmed Assi Al-Jarba and look forward to working with him. A united opposition that represents all Syrians is essential to achieve a negotiated political solution that will provide dignity, freedom and hope to the Syrian people.

Despite professed support for negotiations, the Al-Assad regime is in fact working to thwart any possibility of a peaceful solution. In collusion with Iran- and Hizbullah-backed fighters and advisors, the Al-Assad regime has waged war against the Syrian people. Further, the United States assesses that the regime has used chemical weapons, including the nerve agent sarin, on a small scale against the opposition multiple times in the last year, in violation of international norms.

We again call upon the Al-Assad regime to grant the United Nations team, led by Mr. Sellström, free and unfettered access to investigate any and all credible allegations of the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria. We urge all members of the Council to use their influence with the regime to reinforce that point and take other appropriate steps to support the investigation initiated by Secretary-General Ban.

We also remain deeply concerned by the regime's ongoing campaign against the besieged city of Homs, aided by Hizbullah and Iranian-backed paramilitaries. Residents of the old city of Homs have received little humanitarian aid for the past year, a result of heavy fighting and the Syrian Government's refusal to support the delivery of such aid. We reiterate that there is no justification for the Al-Assad regime to prevent humanitarian access to Homs, and we call on it to allow humanitarian organizations safe access to evacuate the wounded and provide medical treatment. We also reaffirm that those responsible for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law must be held accountable.

The impact of the Syrian conflict has created immense challenges for Syria's neighbours. We strongly commend Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan for their steadfast support of Syrian refugees, and we urge all neighbouring countries to keep their borders open to vulnerable people fleeing for their lives. Refugees

and host countries alike need our urgent and sustained financial support.

Finally, we remain gravely concerned by the violent clashes and bombings in Lebanon, including in Sidon, Tripoli and Beirut. We condemn in the strongest terms the attacks by militants against the Lebanese armed forces that have killed soldiers and civilians. The United States again reiterates our full support for Lebanon's policy of dissociation from the Syrian crisis and its commitment to supporting a stable, sovereign and independent Lebanon. We call on all the parties in Lebanon to abide by the dissociation policy and to act with restraint to ensure Lebanon's stability and security.

We welcome the important step the European Union (EU) took yesterday in agreeing to designate the military wing of Hizbullah as a terrorist organization. With that action, the EU is sending a strong message to Hizbullah that it cannot operate with impunity and that there are consequences for its actions, including last year's deadly attack in Burgas, Bulgaria, which the Security Council rightfully condemned, and for plotting a similar attack in Cyprus. We call on other Governments to follow the EU's lead and take steps to begin reining in Hizbullah's terrorist and criminal activities.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I wish to inform all concerned that, as we have a very large number of speakers, we will be carrying on today's open debate right through the lunch hour.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): Allow me to begin by thanking you, Madam President, for organizing today's timely meeting and to express my delegation's deep appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing.

We meet today a few days after the adoption of a presidential statement, on 10 July in which all members around this table expressed

> "deep concern at all violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and call[ed] on all parties to fully respect Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence within its internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions". (*S/PRST/2013/9*)

While my delegation expresses its appreciation for the Security Council's reiterated calls for full respect of Lebanon's sovereignty, I stand before it today to remind the Council that the basic foundations of resolution 1701 (2006) and of that presidential statement are challenged on a daily basis by Israeli fighter jets. That is highlighted by the Secretary-General in paragraph 9 of his latest report (S/2013/381) on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), where he stated that, "[d]uring the period from 3 to 5 May alone, [the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)] counted 49 Israeli fighter jets violating Lebanese airspace". UNIFIL and my Government protested those violations — my Government did so in the strongest terms — and called for their immediate cessation.

Need I also remind the Council that Israel persists in violating the territorial integrity of my country by occupying the Shaba'a farms and Kfar Shuba Hills? Need I also remind the Council that Israel delays in even responding to the plan proposed by UNIFIL for ending Israel's occupation of the northern part of Ghajar? It is indeed high time that Israel withdraw from the remaining occupied Lebanese territories.

Moreover, it is my privilege once again to recognize the determination of the troop-contributing countries and the men and women of UNIFIL and commend them for their tireless efforts in helping to maintain stability and security in southern Lebanon. Their determination matches Lebanon's commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

On the situation in Syria, let me thank you, Madam President, for the concerns expressed in the Council's presidential statement regarding the "marked increase of cross-border fire from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon" (*S/PRST/2013/9*), which violates my country's sovereignty and threatens to destabilize it.

It is a well-known fact that since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, my country has adopted a policy of dissociation aimed at safeguarding Lebanon's internal unity and stability from regional conflicts, which is a policy that has been reaffirmed in the Baabda Declaration, adopted by the national dialogue committee on 11 June 2012. However, dissociation from the Syrian conflict could not and did not mean dissociating Lebanon from its responsibilities towards our Syrian brothers and its obligation under international law and international humanitarian law. As I told the Council last week, Lebanon will not close its borders, will not turn back refugees and will continue to provide assistance to them within available means (see S/PV.7000). Yet, let me stress once again that Lebanon will not be able, within its scarce and diminishing resources, to cope with the increasing influx of Syrian refugees by itself, hence our repeated appeal for the international community to share the burden and intensify direct support to Lebanon politically and financially.

Turning now to the main subject of today's meeting, I would like to commend the efforts of the Secretary of State of the United States, Mr. John Kerry, for the resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in the hope that they will lead to a just and lasting peace that, in our view, can only be based on the principles and rules of international law, the relevant decisions of the United Nations, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Still, let us state it loud and clear: the main danger facing such negotiations is the continuation of provocative Israeli actions capable of undermining them. To protect the negotiations, those actions ought to be completely stopped. Obviously, there is no better example of such actions than the unabated construction in the past months of Israeli settlements at an unprecedented rate, let alone the approval of new settlement units, the latest being 1,169 units in June and approximately 900 so far this month. How, too, can we not mention the ongoing acts of land confiscation, attacks on property and settler violence?

As to the prospects for the success of the negotiations, the issue was eloquently framed in an editorial in the leading Israeli paper, Ha'aretz, on 21 July:

> "... the main responsibility for moving the talks ahead rests on Israel. Only Israel can put an end to the occupation, which is the key to everything else."

Finally, reference has been made in today's meeting to the addition by the European Union (EU) of what it labeled "the military wing of Hizbullah" to its terrorist list. As expressed yesterday by President Michel Sleiman, my country hopes that the EU

> "will re-examine its position on the basis of avoiding hasty decisions, of safeguarding the stability of Lebanon and of confirming the fundamental options under discussion in the national dialogue committee, mainly dealing with the terms of the Baabda Declaration and the presidential plan for a national defence strategy".

In that regard, it is also clearly fitting to remind the Security Council that, on 19 July, the EU also issued a landmark directive barring cooperation with, and financial support to, Israeli entities and projects beyond the 1967 line in the occupied territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. It might be a small step, as many have said, in view of the guideline nature of the EU instrument, but it is indeed an important step in the right direction. We strongly welcome that development to ask whether or not it is high time for the Council to also send a similar message, indicating that continued occupation in violation of international law can no longer benefit from impunity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Alyas (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Madam President, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations on your country's assumption of the Security Council presidency for this month and for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East.

I would like also to express my country's support for the statements made, or to be made, by the speakers on behalf of the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement. I would also like to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his comprehensive briefing on the topic.

Israel continues to violate international law and the rights of the Palestinian people through acts that include, inter alia, displacement, expulsion, arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of prisoners. It also continues its settlement policy in a quest to change the situation on the ground. That includes, but is not limited to, the

confiscation and destruction of Palestinian homes, the expansion of settlements, arrests, the use of excessive violence against demonstrators and the continued blockade on the Gaza Strip. In addition to all of that, the latest evidence of Israel's arrogance and its defiance of the will of the international community came last week, when it declared its intention to approve the construction of a thousand new housing units in a number of settlements.

Not only does Israel continue to ignore international efforts to revive the peace process, but Israeli officials make statements that threaten the success of the peace process and the two-State solution. That merits broad international condemnation. On the other hand, we have closely monitored the statements and reports on the possible resumption of the peace process between the Palestinians and Israel. Consequently, my delegation stresses the importance of not relying on hopes without the international community continuing to pressure Israel in order to make it understand that there is no choice but peace and that this issue is not limited to routine reviews in the Security Council's deliberations.

Meanwhile, my delegation commends the latest decisions of the European Union (EU) that emphasize the illegitimacy of settlements built on the territories of the West Bank and Jerusalem, and the inclusion of a clause in any future agreements between the EU and Israel emphasizing that those settlements are not under Israel's authority. Moreover, we commend the decisions of the EU not to cooperate with Government agencies, especially the ones in Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. We call on the countries of the world to follow suit and take similar steps to condemn the criminal Israeli actions against Palestinian citizens.

The situation in Syria is deteriorating day by day. To date, more that 100,000 people have been killed, including more than 6,500 children under the age of 10. All of that occurs as the international community remains silent and refrains from forcing the Syrian regime to respond to the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. The Syrian humanitarian crisis is a source of shame for the conscience of the international community, which stands paralysed on this issue. As a result, the Syrian refugee crisis has attained historic proportions, becoming the worst crisis since the genocide in Rwanda, according to testimony in the United Nations.

Through the resolutions of the General Assembly, especially resolution 67/262 of 15 May 2013, the majority of States Members of the United Nations has condemned the Syrian regime, which has massacred tens of thousands of Syrian people. Moreover, the Human Rights Council last June condemned the Syrian regime for its violations of the human rights of the Syrian people. My delegation therefore stresses the importance of implementing these decisions through international measures to support the Syrian people and stop the genocidal massacre being committed by the Syrian regime, as well to prevent a spillover of the crisis in the region, which would have serious consequences with the intervention by third parties, such as the flagrant interference of Hizbullah in Al-Qusayr.

Any delay by the international community in taking action means more suffering for the helpless Syrian people. History too will hold the Council accountable for any such delay.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Machado (Brazil): The past few weeks have once again witnessed important events in the Middle East and in North Africa. Brazil warmly welcomes the announcement by United States Secretary of State John Kerry on July 19 that an agreement has been reached regarding the basis for resuming direct final status negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. That is an encouraging development, one that has the potential for reversing the deadlock and paralysis that have characterized the peace process in recent years. We hope this renewed effort will lead to the full and overdue realization of the two-State solution. It is an opportunity that must not be missed.

The Security Council must provide active and sustained support to the resumption of the peace process and work towards its satisfactory completion. The current situation, with the Council sidelined and sterile efforts to promote peace remaining in the hands of small groups such as the Quartet, should be called into question. Brazil herewith renews its firm and continued commitment to peace between Israel and Palestine and remains ready to support a genuine agenda for peace.

As the parties prepare to re-engage in direct negotiations, we must continue to help meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians, which continue to be quite substantial. The Brazilian Government has just concluded an agreement with the World Food

Programme and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for the donation of 11,500 tons of rice.

As we continue to grapple with the challenges of achieving peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, let us not forget the role played by civil society in the region, and allow those voices that have been clamouring for peace to be heard.

Brazil remains deeply concerned with the situation in Syria, where a human tragedy is unfolding with spillover effects in the entire region. We reiterate our unequivocal condemnation of all forms of violence, by whomsoever committed. We renew our call for an immediate ceasefire, an end to all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and safe, immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access to those in need.

We remain strong supporters of the initiative to convene another Geneva conference as soon as possible in order to promote an inclusive, Syrian-led political process leading to a transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. We renew our support for the work of the Joint Special Representative in that endeavour and encourage him to brief the General Assembly on his initiatives.

Comprehensive negotiations are the only viable option at hand. Brazil reiterates its repudiation of actions that further militarize the conflict in Syria. We call on all members of the international community, including members of the Security Council, to heed the recommendation of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry and cease arms transfers to all actors involved in the conflict. The argument that providing weapons to the parties will help reach a military balance and somehow contribute to the success of the planned Geneva conference is seriously flawed. It will only promote an arms race, which in turn will further reduce the chances of a political understanding.

A diplomatic surge, not an arms surge, is the path to a political settlement which this Council should promote. Furthermore, it is clear that more weapons can sadly lead to more human rights violations. In the light of the conclusions of the Commission of Inquiry that all parties have gravely violated human rights, the protection of civilians requires fewer, not more, arms in the hands of the parties.

In view of the grave deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, we commend neighbouring countries for the humanitarian assistance provided to Syrian refugees. We recognize that the burden placed on the shoulders of those exercising active and laudable solidarity with the Syrians has been extremely heavy. Brazil has been contributing financially through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to mitigate the plight of the refugees and internally displaced people.

Brazil has been following with great concern the grave situation in Egypt. We urge all actors to seek solutions to the challenges facing the country with full respect for the institutions. We further call for dialogue and reconciliation, so that the legitimate aspirations of the Egyptian people to freedom, democracy and prosperity can be achieved without violence and fully within the democratic order.

Let me conclude with a brief comment on Lebanon. It is particularly worrisome that the violence is becoming more and more sectarian, creating further challenges in a country as diverse as Lebanon.

More than ever, the international community must strongly and effectively support President Michel Sleiman and the Lebanese Government's commitment to the dissociation policy. Peace and stability in Lebanon should be firmly upheld by the international community, with the resolute involvement of the Council, as exemplified by its presidential statement of 10 July (S/PRST/2013/9), which we support. We call on all parties in Syria to fully respect the sovereignty, political independence and territorial unity of Lebanon. It is in their own interest not to further destabilize the country. We also call on all Lebanese actors to avoid further escalation and to embark on the path of political understanding.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Chullikatt (Holy See): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for having convened this meeting.

The Holy See has repeatedly voiced its urgent concern for the peace and welfare of all the peoples in the Middle East, regardless of their ethnicity or religion. Pope Francis, in his first Easter message, on 31 March this year, appealed for:

> "Peace for the Middle East, and particularly between Israelis and Palestinians, who struggle to find the road of agreement, that they may willingly and courageously resume negotiations to end a conflict that has lasted all too long. Peace ... above all for dear Syria, for its people torn by conflict and for the many refugees who await help and comfort. How much blood has been shed! And how much suffering must there still be before a political solution to the crisis is found?"

Given the extreme seriousness of what has been unfolding in Syria, especially during these past few months, my delegation wishes to focus its remarks today on the unbearable suffering of its people.

The whole world has been shocked by the ever-increasing statistics describing the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. The tragedy of such an intolerable situation demands from us immediate measures to assist the some 1.8 million refugees who now seek peace, security and safety in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt.

Further, there are over 4 million internally displaced persons, constituting nearly 18 per cent of the population, and 6.8 million victims of this conflict, half of whom are children, require urgent humanitarian assistance. More than 4 million people have lost their homes. Moreover, the challenges faced by neighbouring countries in assisting and protecting refugees appear to contribute to the further political destabilization of the region.

On the political front, this destructive conflict is only being exacerbated by outside influences and extremist groups, which see it as an opportunity for political or ideological gains rather than as an appalling disaster that is engulfing Syria. Today, while recognizing that the conflict has negative repercussions for everyone, my delegation would like to bring to the international community's attention the devastating impact that the conflict is having on Syria's Christian population, a population which in its various traditions has been present in the country for 2,000 years.

These days, the Christian community faces numerous challenges to its very survival in the region. Christians face, on the one hand, ideological extremist groups that seek to eradicate them from the region, and, on the other, continued insecurity for their families and homes as they are left to fend for themselves. The murder of the Catholic priest François Murad is just one of the many heinous acts in a long series of kidnappings of Christians, including bishops and priests, and of gruesome killings of innocent civilians. Christians have also witnessed the destruction of more than 60 of their churches and affiliated institutions. Here I would like to thank the representative of Togo for having kindly remembered the murder of Father Murad.

In many cases, they have had to seek ways and means, in the midst of dangerous and life-threatening circumstances, to safeguard their treasured sacred objects and priceless manuscripts and artifacts bearing witness to their bi-millennial tradition and culture, which constitutes a veritable world heritage of outstanding universal value for the whole of humanity.

These pertinent remarks are not indicative of any lack of concern on the part of the Holy See for the suffering that afflicts each and every Syrian citizen, regardless of religion or ethnicity. Rather, they are a fitting expression of the solicitude of the Holy See for the whole Christian family and of what should be the serious apprehension of the entire world about the overlooked fate of so many thousands of victims, including Christians as well as other ethnic and religious minorities, who find themselves ruthlessly targeted in that conflict through no fault of their own, and who now, caught in the crossfire, are struggling for their very survival. My delegation is convinced that there can be no social progress and no justice if religious and ethnic minorities are not accorded their rightful place as full members of society.

The persistent refusal on the part of both sides to the conflict to engage in a meaningful political dialogue aimed at building a reconciled Syria augurs only more deaths, fear, hatred and destruction. As has been stated many times in this Chamber and in other international forums, there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. Regardless of this, the parties to the conflict manifest the determination, with total impunity, to shed yet more blood, to supply yet more weapons and to destroy more lives before they can be brought to the negotiating table.

War can never more be considered a means of resolving conflicts. Yet war, when it occurs, can be won only through peace; yes, peace won through negotiations, dialogue and reconciliation. It is my delegation's hope, therefore, that the international community can find the courage to reconcile its differences and show the political determination necessary to pave the path to

the much-awaited "Geneva II" conference, so as to help all parties to the conflict rediscover the indispensable path of dialogue with a view to reaching a concerted and negotiated solution.

My delegation commends every effort to that end and calls upon all responsible parties to desist from hindering the long-overdue negotiated settlement of this conflict. Peace in Syria makes us all winners, whereas enduring conflict surely guarantees only losers.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Storaci: I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU). The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Ukraine and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

The European Union warmly welcomes the announcement by United States Secretary of State John Kerry on 19 July that an agreement had been reached establishing a basis for resuming direct final status negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. This is a crucial step towards achieving a lasting resolution to the conflict. The European Union commends Secretary Kerry's dedication and the personal commitment demonstrated by Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas.

The European Union also praises the significant efforts made by the League of Arab States to confirm the strategic importance of the Arab Peace Initiative for all parties.

Given the challenging negotiations ahead and the difficult decisions to be taken, the continued bold leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu and their sustained willingness to engage in good faith will be crucial to success. Once negotiations resume, they should lead to tangible and timely progress. The European Union urges all parties to refrain from actions that could undermine the negotiation process and the prospects for peace.

The European Union recalls its previous Council conclusions laying down its vision for the two-State solution, resulting in an agreement on all final status issues, ending all claims, and fulfilling the legitimate aspiration of both parties, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition, both States enjoying normal relations with all the countries of the region. It also recalls previous conclusions and will continue to address all issues that put the viability of the two-State solution at risk.

The European Union will remain fully engaged with both parties and will also continue to contribute, together with other regional and international partners, including within the Quartet, to a negotiated solution on all final status issues, including Jerusalem, borders, security, water and refugees. The European Union will give active and concrete support to help ensure negotiations between the parties are successful, including through support to any international arrangements aimed at underpinning a peace agreement. If an agreement to finally end this conflict were reached, the door would open to deepened and enhanced cooperation between the European Union and all the countries of the region, contributing to the prospects for a new era of peace, security and prosperity.

I will continue with a shortened statement. I would ask participants to refer to the distributed text for the whole statement.

With regard to the situation in Syria, the EU is appalled by the disastrous humanitarian situation and the continuing military crackdown of the regime, in particular the relentless shelling of Homs, as well as the denial of humanitarian access for the United Nations and other humanitarian actors, which we deplore. We are also alarmed by reports of the increasing brutality of certain armed opposition groups. The European Union demands that all parties ensure immediate, regular, safe, unfettered and unimpeded access for aid organizations to those in need in all areas of Syria, and through all possible routes and channels, including across borders and across conflict lines. In that regard, the EU strongly supports the appeal made by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos on the Council on 16 July, and in that connection calls on the Security Council to fully shoulder its responsibilities.

The EU welcomes and strongly supports the joint initiative of the United States and Russia to bring about a political settlement in Syria by convening a Geneva conference. The EU welcomes the Syrian National Coalition's enlargement, which will allow for an effective, representative and cohesive participation of the opposition at this conference.

The EU is deeply concerned over the involvement of extremist and foreign non-State actors in the fighting in Syria on all warring sides, and with the rising sectarian tension in Lebanon and Iraq.

The EU reiterates the importance of the role of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, and expresses grave concern about the findings reflected in its latest report. The EU reaffirms that there will be no impunity for any violation and abuse of human rights or international humanitarian law, and recalls that the Council can refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court at any time, as requested in the letter from the Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland to the Council of 14 January 2013 (S/2013/19).

The European Union is gravely concerned by the recent assessment on the use of chemical weapons and agents within Syria. The EU therefore once again urges the Syrian authorities to grant the United Nations fact-finding mission full and unfettered access to all sites of alleged use of chemical weapons without delay.

Please allow me to turn to Lebanon. The European Union fully subscribes to the content of the presidential statement on Lebanon of 10 July 2013 (S/PRST/2013/9). The European Union commends Lebanon's decision to keep its borders open to all refugees. In its generous efforts of hosting and assisting these refugees, the Lebanese authorities, however, face serious challenges that have wide-ranging humanitarian, political, security and socioeconomic implications.

The European Union has provided over €113 million in support for Lebanon since the beginning of the crisis and is committed to continuing its assistance.

The European Union reaffirms its support to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, to which EU member States actively contribute, and underlines the importance of Lebanon's continued commitment to the full implementation of the relevant Council resolutions and other international obligations, including those of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

The EU notes with deep concern the involvement of Lebanese parties in the fighting in Syria, including Hizbullah's openly acknowledged participation. It also underscores its growing concern at cross-border shelling and rocket fire from Syria into Lebanon, and reiterates that violations of Lebanon's sovereignty are unacceptable. We urge all Lebanese actors to heed the call of President Sleiman to abide in practice by Lebanon's policy of dissociation from the Syrian conflict, and to continue to genuinely commit to this and other principles enshrined in the Baabda Declaration.

The European Union urges a prompt formation of a new Lebanese Government, and further encourages Lebanese political leaders to resume their deliberations over the electoral framework and the arrangements for parliamentary elections.

Let me conclude with a few words on the situation in Egypt, which we follow with great concern. The EU greatly values its relationship with Egypt and continues to stand with the Egyptian people in their struggle for dignity, democracy, social justice and a decent life. Yesterday, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU agreed to the Council's conclusions on Egypt, which outline the EU's positions and concerns and to which we refer. Let me reaffirm three key messages.

It is of utmost importance that Egypt embark on a transition, allowing a transfer of power to a civilian-led and democratically elected Government. Inclusivity remains central to this process. All parties must refrain from violence, and security and public order must be maintained, while showing restraint and full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EU stands ready to assist the Egyptian people in their desire for a democratic and prosperous future.

I wish to add one point with regard to the European Commission guidelines published last Friday, to which the Permanent Representative of Israel and others referred. Let me quote a statement made by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in that regard. That document

> "reiterates the long-held position that bilateral agreements with Israel do not cover the territory that came under Israel's administration in June 1967".

This is meant to clarify the European Union's position in advance of negotiations of agreements with Israel during the forthcoming EU Financial Perspective commencing in 2014. In no way will this pre-judge the outcome of peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. The EU's long-held position is that it will recognize changes made to the borders once they are agreed to by both parties. In that way, the EU hopes to create an atmosphere for meaningful and sustainable

negotiations leading to a peace agreement between the parties.

However, the specific provisions of the guidelines will not be implemented before 1 January 2014. In the meanwhile, the EU looks forward to working and consulting with Israel on a broad range of bilateral issues, and has invited Israel to hold discussions on the territorial scope of agreements with the European Union that are currently under preparation.

The President: I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Madam, for your leadership of the Council this month. I also thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, for his comprehensive briefing.

The volatile regional environment should not deflect our attention from the Israeli-Palestinian track. Finding a durable and just solution to this conflict is no less important. The relative calm that prevails for now could signal more turbulence.

We welcome the announcement in Amman with regard to the conclusion of an agreement setting the bases for the resumption of talks between Israelis and Palestinians. The Committee appreciates the intense diplomatic activity of the American Secretary of State, John Kerry, who enjoys the support of the Arab League follow-up committee, as well as of many heads of State.

It is imperative for the international community to pursue its commitment in order to ensure that the parties live up to their promises, negotiate in good faith and refrain from any action that could jeopardize the negotiation process. Just last month, the Committee convened in Beijing an international meeting on the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. The large number of participants and the extensive media coverage showed that the international community sees this as a priority issue. The Committee sincerely thanks the Chinese Government for hosting thr event and is grateful to the Chinese experts for their active participation.

The need to redouble longstanding efforts to reach a negotiated two-State settlement was widely recognized among participants at the conference. Speakers appreciated the renewed engagement of the United States and believed that the energetic diplomatic efforts of Secretary of State John Kerry should be given a chance to show results. They appreciated China's efforts and initiatives and welcomed the dynamic role played by the League of Arab States. Nonetheless, they regretted that other key stakeholders, such as the Council and the Quartet, remained on the sidelines. They were also deeply troubled by Israel's refusal to abide by its legal obligation to halt all settlement activities, to respect the 1967 borders and to free prisoners, which blocks any progress.

July marks nine years since the issuance of the International Court of Justice advisory opinion (see A/ES-10/273)that reaffirmed the illegal nature of all settlements and called on Israel to dismantle the separation wall and compensate Palestinians for all damages. It has been 34 years since the adoption of resolution 446 (1979), in which the Security Council called on Israel to stop transferring settlers to occupied territories. Both texts remain dead letters. The construction of the wall continues, causing grave humanitarian hardship. The first quarter of 2013 saw an alarming rise in settlement activity, as compared to 2012.

The recent European Commission directive that bans all European Union funding for Israeli projects in the settlements is a first concrete step towards preventing the development of those settlements. We welcome it and hope it will be followed by other measures. It sends a strong message and shows that the international community has ran out of patience with regard to Israeli settlements. The Israeli leadership should pay heed and act wisely if they do not wish to irreparably harm the efforts being made to restart negotiations.

The Committee will continue to remind States Members of the United Nations of their obligation to ensure Israel's compliance with international law. It will keep calling for the lifting of the siege on Gaza, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). We hope that, despite regional upheavals, Palestinians will not lose sight of the goal of reconciliation, without which there can be no two-State solution, as the deadline for elections and for constituting a Government of national unity approaches.We will continue to mobilize assistance for Palestinian State institutions. The Committee can be relied upon to support all efforts to relaunch good-faith negotiations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express our appreciation for the excellent briefing by Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

The delegation of Egypt supports the statements to be delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. I wish to add some additional points.

First, Egypt supports the recent efforts by the United States aimed at resuming peace negotiations, following a number of visits by the Secretary of State to the region. Those efforts recently led to the announcement that direct talks between the two parties would resume shortly. We hope those efforts will result in real progress soon, before we reach a point of no return regarding the two-State solution. We also reaffirm that United States mediation efforts are not enough by themselves. The Israeli side must also show the political necessary for the negotiations to succeed. They must choose between peace and settlements, and choose peace rather than settlements. Egypt also looks forward to reviving the road map of the Quartet once peace negotiations have resumed.

Secondly, Egypt supports Palestine's position that negotiations should start on the basis of the 1967 borders and a stop to settlement activities. It emphasizes that demands made by Palestine are not preconditions; they only reflect a legitimate call for the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Thirdly, Egypt condemns the continued Israeli attacks on Palestinians in the occupied territories, the persistent violence by Israeli settlers against unarmed Palestinians and the destruction of Palestinian property. It calls for the immediate release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners being held in Israeli detention centres and for an end to the violations to which they are subjected.

Fourthly, Egypt condemns the illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in East Jerusalem and surrounding areas. It calls on the international community to take firm measures to stop those illegal acts, which most recently include Israel's plan to expel the population of eight Palestinian villages in southern Hebron under the pretext that they fall within the scope of a military training area, as well as the approval by the Israeli Knesset of a law on the organized resettlement of Bedouins in the Negev. In that connection, Egypt recalls that, in March 2012, the Commission on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination determined that the draft law would legalize racist practices against Arab citizens in Israel in order to settle the Arab population on the smallest land area.

We also call for a halt to the approval by Israeli authorities of a public park south of Jerusalem. One fifth of that park is to be built on Palestinian land — an innovative form of land confiscation.

Egypt commends the recent decision of the European Union to exclude the settlements from any future agreement with Israel. It clearly indicates non-recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Arab territories occupied since 1967. Egypt views this decisions as a step in the right direction, a step towards the two-State solution, and a step to resist the intensification of settlements. We hope that it will convince Israel to stop building settlements, instead of restricting the activities of the European Union in the West Bank in response.

Fifth, Egypt rejects the illegal Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, as well as the restrictions imposed on the Palestinian Authority. They have led to the destruction of the Palestinian economy and the deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestinians.

Sixth, the Egyptian security forces are addressing the security threats in Sinai, in accordance with the provisions of the peace accords.

Seventh, Egypt reaffirms situation in the region should not distract us from the developments related to the question of Palestine, or from the need to stop the settlement activities and establish the independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. Nevertheless, we also call for an immediate end to the violence in Syria, urgent assistance to the Syrian refugees, and the provision of the necessary support to the countries hosting them. We reaffirm the importance of preserving the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, while maintaining the cohesion of Syrian society.

The current situation in Syria in no way justifies the continued occupation of the Syrian Golan. We call for the implementation of Security Council resolutions related to the occupied Syrian Golan, including the Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian territories. We are deeply concerned by the increasing breaches of

Lebanese airspace by the Israeli air force, in violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and in contravention of the United Nations Charter, international law, and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Egypt once again calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities by taking the necessary measures for the immediate cessation of the illegal Israeli settlements activities and ensuring a final solution, especially since the question of Palestine has been and still is the main reason behind the instability in the Middle East region which threatens international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): We thank you, Madam, for organizing this open debate. The Middle East is going through a significant period of transition and change. At the heart of the challenges we face in the region still lies the Palestinian question. This issue continues to undermine the prospects for regional peace, cooperation and welfare.

Turkey has always supported a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, and with us on an equal footing under this roof. The revival of the Middle East peace process and the resumption of comprehensive peace negotiations between the parties for a just and lasting solution have become increasingly crucial.

In this regard, we appreciate and support the recent efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry towards a breakthrough in revitalizing talks between the parties. Another chance for a viable two-State solution should not be missed. We encourage the parties to commit to preparing a solid ground for talks on the basis of 1967 borders, with agreed land swaps. Parties must build confidence, including settlement freeze, prisoner release and security arrangements for both sides. We also believe that any provocative step against holy sites, especially the Al-Aqsa mosque, must be avoided.

I would like to reiterate once again that Turkey is, as always, ready to contribute to all international efforts towards a just and lasting settlement.

Unfortunately, Israel's illegal settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, remain a major obstacle to meaningful negotiations. It is time to seriously commit to and respect the established parameters of the peace process. The worrying situation of the Palestinian prisoners under Israeli custody continues to be yet another source of great concern.

We are following closely the developments regarding the recent European Union guidelines banning funding and other provisions in relation to the occupied territories.

It goes without saying that the blockade on Gaza is inhumane, illegal and unsustainable. We repeat our call on the Israeli Government to lift the blockade, in accordance with its bilateral and multilateral commitments. In the meantime, Turkey will continue to fully support Palestinian reconciliation, which we believe constitutes one of the bases of a lasting solution and peace in the Middle East. We strongly support the goal of establishing a unity Government, embracing the Palestinian people as a whole, within the timeframe determined in Cairo on 14 May.

The achievement of Palestinian reconciliation and unity must enjoy importance and priority in the search for a fair, comprehensive and viable solution to save Palestine from the yoke of occupation. Turkey will continue to support the Peace Process, as well as the rightful aspirations of the Palestinian people to internationally recognized statehood in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

This is the third Ramadan that the Syrian people are living the inhumane and indiscriminate attacks by the Syrian regime. The situation in Syria is already the biggest humanitarian tragedy of the twenty-first century. The crisis is increasingly threatening regional peace and security, as well as posing a grave burden on Syria's neighbours.

There is an immediate need for a political solution paving the way for a democratic transition in accordance with the legitimate demands of the Syrian people. However, the prospect for a peaceful settlement will remain elusive so long as the attacks of the regime continue unabated with heavy weapons, including ballistic missiles and chemical weapons. This is totally unacceptable.

We must act urgently to stop the attacks of the regime, protect the people of Syria, ensure the withdrawal of foreign militia forces from Syria, and

start the democratic transition process. In this vein, we once again call on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and act urgently, resolutely and collectively.

Let me conclude by reiterating that 2013 is vital for peace in the Middle East, and it is now time for sincere and concrete action. We need to seize any momentum that will help to revitalize the talks between the parties and take concerted action towards a two-State solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation reiterates its forceful rejection of the insistence of certain delegations on diverting the deliberations of the Security Council on the item "The situation in the Middle East" from the primary purpose for which it was established by forcibly introducing other topics outside the scope of the item, such as the internal situations in Syria, Egypt, Lebanon or other countries. Their objective is clearly to marginalize the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, to demote it on the list of United Nations priorities, and to nullify the terms of reference and substance of the item, which, as we all know, is connected primarily to the effort to end the Israeli occupation and to achieve a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with the well-known terms of reference.

It was very strange to hear the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General disregard, in his briefing this morning, the clear legal description of the occupied Syrian Golan accepted by the United Nations. He continually referred to "the Golan" rather than to "the occupied Syrian Golan", which is the accepted expression used in the United Nations. On top of that was his failure to address the importance of ending the Israeli occupation of the Golan in accordance with Security Council resolutions. He also failed to highlight the cooperation between Israel, on one side, and the armed terrorist groups that are active in the area of separation in the Golan, on the other side.

I will not respond to the arguments and claims of certain delegations about my country under the agenda item for this meeting, because I do not wish to contribute to efforts that serve only the continuing Israeli occupation and the policies of those who protect it. I should say, however, that we have much to say in refutation and dissection of the claims made by the delegations of the same States that support, shelter and arm the terrorists spreading destruction and extremism in Syria and working very hard to ensure the failure of any peaceful solution to the crisis under Syrian leadership. In that regard, I would name in particular the Governments of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as well as various well-known Western States, as was recently confirmed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former United States National Security Advisor, and Roland Dumas, a former Minister for Foreign Affairs of France.

The Israeli occupation of the Arab territories and its consequences for the peace and security of the area have reached dangerous levels, in the context of the international community's failure to compel Israel to end the occupation in compliance with the relevant international resolutions and to halt Israel's gross violations of international conventions, particularly the 1949 Geneva Conventions, and its continuing and unprecedented settlement activity and expulsion of Arab peoples from their lands. In that regard, it is very strange that certain countries that feign enthusiasm for the protection of civilians and respect for human rights lose that enthusiasm where Israeli violations are concerned, depriving the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination and to rid themselves of the racist Israeli occupation. In that regard, we should point out the dangers of Israel's pursuit of what is called the Prawer Plan, which effectively seeks to confiscate 800,000 dunums of Arab lands in the Negev, destroy 36 Arab villages and displace 45,000 Palestinian residents from their homes in order to build Israeli settlements instead, in order to further its plans for ethnic cleansing and Judaization, practised by Israel in full view of merchants of crisis around the world.

The suffering of Syrian citizens continues under the Israeli occupation in the Syrian Golan, in the absence of the international will needed to end that occupation in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 497 (1981), and in the context of the impotence of international human rights mechanisms and the failure to take steps to end Israel's methodical and gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the Golan. There has unfortunately been no serious international movement to end those violations, or to halt the campaign of settlement, oppression and racial discrimination, as well as the kidnapping of Syrian citizens from the area of separation and Israel's construction of a separation wall in the occupied Golan. Almost 46 years have passed since Israel occupied the Golan and began its barbaric

practices there. Unfortunately, during that time, we have heard no one call for meetings aimed at defending and protecting the population of the Golan suffering under the occupation or those displaced by Israel from their lands. We have heard no one call for conferences to be held to collect humanitarian assistance for those people — not to mention the fact that the enthusiasm of certain parties for establishing commissions of inquiry suddenly evaporated when it came to the occupied Syrian Golan.

Thanks to this international silence concerning such Israeli practices, Israel went so far as to commit an act of aggression against Syrian territories on 5 May, and has continued to threaten further such acts. We would like to state here that Israel's continued perpetration of such acts of aggression has increased tension in the area to unprecedented levels that could lead to the outbreak of a widespread regional war, which could threaten international peace and security. The continuing practice of certain permanent members of the Security Council of providing cover for acts of aggression and occupation of Arab territories by Israel makes them partners in those acts and entirely responsible for their consequences.

Israeli occupation forces are providing assistance to terrorist groups in the area of separation in Golan by transporting injured terrorists across the line of separation to Israeli hospitals, where they are treated and returned to Syrian territory across the line of separation, where they can continue their terrorist activities in that very sensitive area. We should focus on the fact that such Israeli assistance to terrorists is not merely a blatant violation of the Separation of Forces Agreement, the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and international law, it also puts the lives of United Nations forces there at risk and undermines their work. That is exactly what happened when, on several occasions, terrorist groups kidnapped members of UNDOF's staff with direct incitement by Qatari intelligence. This is a very grave matter, and we are still awaiting the results of the Under-Secretary-General's investigation of it.

In conclusion, there are those whom it behooves not to continue deceiving themselves and the rest of the world or providing justifications and excuses for Israel. It is well known to all that Israel is a settlement entity built on ethnic cleansing and that it has thus never been concerned with peace. It has responded to every peace initiative with postponements, diversions and justifications about what they falsely term security concerns, at the expense of the Arab population, which has now been living under the Israeli occupation for decades.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): I will be making a shorter statement and circulating the full text.

Malaysia associates itself with the statements to be made by the representatives of Iran, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and of Djibouti, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Malaysians join other Muslims around the world in observing this Islamic holy month of Ramadan. At the same time, our thoughts are with our fellows of the Ummah who face oppression and subjugation under the ongoing illegal Israeli occupation. As a member of the United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, we participated in a fact-finding mission to Amman and Cairo last month, where we heard disturbing testimony by witnesses. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to deteriorate, and as Israel continues to build illegal settlements, the window for peace is slowly closing.

The Special Committee was told that Israel had reinstated the three-nautical-mile limit on fishermen from Gaza and conducted numerous arrests, as well as confiscating boats. That has led to a decrease of 60 per cent in the total amount of fish caught this year, which in turn has contributed to the 80 per cent poverty rate among Palestinian fishermen. We also heard testimony that farmers from Gaza have had to face danger in farming on their own lands where they fall in the deadly buffer zone, where Israeli soldiers have fired indiscriminately at people as far as 300 to 1,000 metres away. By the end of last year, that heinous practice had claimed the lives of five Palestinians and resulted in another 92 injured.

The economic blockade on Gaza, including the near total restriction on exports, is producing chilling results. My delegation reiterates its condemnation of that illegal blockade, which is now in its seventh year, and calls for an end to such cynical and deliberate Israeli policies of collective punishment towards the Palestinian people.

My delegation also remains deeply concerned about the illegal detention of more than 5,000 Palestinian prisoners. What is more alarming is the detention of approximately 200 Palestinian children. The appalling conditions that the children have had to endure will do nothing but inflict long-term psychological damage on such young minds. We therefore demand the release of all Palestinian children in Israeli detention centres.

It is no surprise to us that Israel also continues to contravene international law with impunity elsewhere in the Middle East. Early this year, Israel granted exclusive rights to a United States-Israeli company to drill for oil in half of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights — a blatant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

With regard to the Middle East peace process, Malaysia is keenly observing the developments leading up to the potential resumption of direct negotiations. We recognize the progress made by the shuttle diplomacy of Secretary of State John Kerry. We wish him well and offer our support for his tireless efforts to try to bring the two sides together.

It is therefore timely to reiterate our support for a two-State solution based on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

My delegation also commends the European Union for its recently announced European Commission guidelines, which backs up its position and political commitments with effective sanctions against Israeli settlement practices.

Turning to the situation in Syria, Malaysia welcomes the United States-Russia initiative to organize an international conference. We stress the need for an immediate cessation to violence and underscore the importance of dialogue to reach a political solution. Malaysians empathize with the suffering of the Syrian people. Nevertheless, in our view, only the Syrian people can decide on their own destiny. We therefore continue to believe that a Syrian-led inclusive political process is the way forward, based on resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012), as well as the final communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) of the Action Group for Syria issued in Geneva on 30 June 2012.

To conclude, Malaysia reiterates its support for Lebanon in its efforts to fully liberate all of its territories. In that regard, we urge Israel to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006), which calls for a permanent ceasefire and for the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, with full respect for the Blue Line.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Umemoto (Japan): At the outset, I would like to thank the United States Mission for its leadership in convening this open debate. I also express my appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Japan has long understood the aspiration of Palestinians to build an independent State and has supported the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Japan therefore endorses a two-State solution, under which Israel and a future independent Palestinian State would coexist, side by side, in peace and security.

From that standpoint, Japan sincerely welcomes the announcement made by United States Secretary of State Kerry last week in Amman on an agreement that establishes a basis for resuming direct final-status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. The entire international community should now mobilize the political and economic means at its disposal to help Israel and Palestine overcome their differences.

At this critical juncture, Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida will visit Israel, Palestine and Jordan starting today. Through bilateral meetings with his counterparts, he will urge both parties to conduct frank and meaningful negotiations in order to make substantial progress, based on the agreement announced by Secretary of State Kerry.

My Minister is also scheduled to chair a ministerial-level meeting with Israel, Palestine and Jordan to discuss the "corridor for peace and prosperity". That initiative, which Japan launched in 2006 with the aim of developing a sustainable Palestinian economy, has been making tangible progress. Several companies have expressed interest in its flagship project, the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park. Japan looks forward to future investments coming from various countries and areas for that project.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our commitment to the Middle East peace process and to close cooperation with the United States, Arab countries, Europe and other partners. In that context, Japan will continue to actively promote its initiative

of the conference on cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian development.

With regard to Syria, Japan is deeply concerned about the serious and escalating situation there. Japan profoundly deplores the death of many thousands of people as a result of violence, which continues despite the Secretary-General's appeal to its cessation during Ramadan. The briefings to the Council by United Nations humanitarian agencies last week (see S/PV.7000) were yet another occasion to hear appalling accounts of the tragic incidents taking place daily on the ground. Japan concurs with the Council's concern, expressed in a presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/9) adopted on 10 July, at the risk of the regionalization of the Syrian conflict, especially its growing impact on Lebanon's stability.

Faced with this scourge of war, the entire international community urgently needs to address the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. Japan remains committed to significantly contributing to such international efforts. Japan's support through international organizations and non-governmental organizations now totals $90 million. Japan has also been disbursing ¥ 240 million in loans for the stabilization of Jordan. As part of cross-border assistance, Japan will provide assistance in health services and other areas to local residents, in cooperation with the assistance units of opposition groups and local non-governmental organizations.

Humanitarian assistance, however, cannot be an end in itself. The political process needs to be engaged as a matter of urgency. In that respect, it is regrettable that recent military offensives by the Syrian army have made it even more difficult to convene the "Geneva II" conference. Japan condemns the Syrian authorities for not keeping their commitments and responsibilities to protect their own citizens, and calls upon all parties in Syria to immediately halt the violence and human rights abuses. We must all strive to create an appropriate environment that will bring about an early Syrian-led political transition. Japan hopes to see the Syrian National Coalition play a major role in advancing the political process under the leadership of its newly-elected President Ahmed Al-Jarba.

Before concluding, I would like to briefly touch upon Egypt. Following the swearing in of the interim President Adly Mansour, an interim Government has been set up and begun working according to its political road map. Japan calls on all the relevant parties to desist from acts of violence and to exhibit maximum self-restraint and responsibility. At the same time, Japan hopes that Egypt will return to a democratically elected civilian Government as soon as possible through an inclusive process that respects human rights and the rule of law.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Miss Hassan (Djibouti): I would like to clarify that my delegation has the honour to speak on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as that fact has not been reflected in the list of speakers.

I congratulate the United States for assuming the presidency this month and commend you, Mr. President, for the way you are steering its work. I would like also to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his briefing today.

I wish to express the appreciation and support of the OIC for the efforts of Secretary of State John Kerry aimed at resuming the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Those timely efforts are essential to achieving the lofty goal of resolving the thorny Arab-Israeli conflict. We hope that Secretary Kerry will succeed in bringing the parties back to the negotiation table, as the implications of missing fundamental opportunities are certainly unfavourable, especially at a time when the situation in the Middle East is highly unstable and volatile.

Despite the promising reality that has emerged from the recent efforts exerted by Secretary Kerry to revitalize Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, Israel, the occupying Power, has persisted in carrying out illegal practices aimed at fortifying its decades-long occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

In that regard, the OIC believes that Israeli settlement activities, chiefly in occupied East Jerusalem, which have markedly escalated recently, remain the core challenge that needs to be seriously addressed. There is no doubt that, at a time when well-intended efforts have been made to give a new lease on life to the Middle East peace process, the continuation of the illegal Israeli settlement activities, in violation of international law and peace commitments, will only undermine prospects for the two-State solution and destabilize the region. Hence, Israel's willingness to engage in serious peace negotiations will depend upon its genuine readiness

to halt all of its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem.

The OIC, which has endorsed the Arab Peace Initiative, believes that efforts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict should be carried out within the widely agreed upon parameters, particularly the well-established principle of Israel's withdrawal from the territories that it occupied in 1967, and the establishment of the independent Palestinian State on those territories. That raises the need for Israel to unequivocally accept the 1967 borders in order to facilitate the resumption of peace negotiations. At the same time, Israel, the occupying Power, should carry out several confidence-building measures that can create an environment favourable to the resumption of peace negotiations. Releasing Palestinian detainees, especially those detained prior to the signing of the Oslo Accords, remains an important cornerstone in that regard.

In addition, the removal of Israeli restrictions imposed on the mobility of Palestinians and the prevention of acts of terror by fanatical Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians are important steps that should be taken prior to recommencing negotiations. In that connection, the OIC welcomes the decision of the European Union (EU) to exclude Israeli settlements from any future agreement with any EU country, and to prohibit funding, cooperation and the issuance of scholarship or research grants to any Israeli individuals or institutions located in the settlements situated in the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967.

Nevertheless, the OIC is very concerned about the human rights violations against Palestinians in Israeli jails. The deaths of Palestinian prisoners in an Israeli jail early this year not only exposed the inhuman policies and systematic violations perpetrated by the Israeli occupation against Palestinian prisoners, it also requires urgent intervention by the international community to take effective action in order to defend the Palestinian prisoners' human rights, save their lives and pressure Israel to respect its obligations towards Palestinian detainees in accordance with international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions, and to release them immediately.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation is very much concerned about the deteriorating situation in Syria and the ongoing bloodshed, violence and destruction of property. The OIC stresses the need to preserve Syria's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The OIC therefore calls for the immediate cessation of violence, killing and destruction, for respect for Islamic values and human rights, and for saving Syria from the danger of an all-out civil war.

The OIC urges the Syrian regime to show wisdom and to engage in serious dialogue with the opposition in order to pave the way for a transition process that allows the Syrian people to achieve their legitimate aspirations for democratic reforms and changes. However, while reiterating the OIC's commitment to a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria, the OIC calls upon the international community, in particular the Security Council, to assume its responsibilities and act promptly to stop the killing, destruction and displacement perpetrated against the Syrian people, and to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the Syrian crisis.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of the OIC with the Palestinian people, in their endeavour to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including their right of return, self- determination and the establishment of their independent Palestinian State on their national soil, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): It is an honour for me to address the Security Council on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Since the last open debate (see S/PV.6950), despite regional and international peace initiatives and efforts, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued its policy of the colonization of Palestine. The occupying Power's settlement campaign reached a seven-year high in the first quarter of this year alone, in violation of the relevant resolutions and in grave breach of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Palestinian civilians have continued to be arrested, detained and forcibly displaced. The occupying forces have continued to use excessive force against Palestinian demonstrators and to cause civilian casualties. The blockade on the Gaza Strip has continued, inflicting grave socioeconomic loss and humanitarian hardship.

And settlers have continued to attack and terrorize Palestinians and their villages and properties, including religious sites.

In addition to announcing plans to construct more than 1,000 settlement units, in recent months more Palestinian land has been seized by the occupying forces and more Palestinian buildings have been demolished, displacing several Palestinian families. Acts of provocation have continued against Muslim and Christian holy sites, especially in occupied East Jerusalem, dangerously inflaming religious sensitivities.

The ongoing Israeli settlement campaign and other provocative and illegal actions underscore the occupying Power's preference for occupation, annexation and domination of the Palestinian people and their land. It also starkly highlights the occupying Power's unwillingness to respect international law and to act in good faith for the sake of peace and stability in the Middle East.

As a result, the recent period has witnessed the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders remains in grave danger. If Israel persists with such unlawful behaviour, it will only undermine the current efforts being exerted aimed at achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and will further destabilize the fragile situation, which threatens international peace and security.

The international community must therefore act to ensure that those efforts do not fail. That requires that Israel, the occupying Power, be called upon to cease forthwith all of its illegal measures and to abide by international law and the spirit and long-standing parameters of the peace process.

The Non-Aligned Movement therefore reiterates its call for a halt to all the occupying Power's illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territory. Respect for international law and United Nations resolutions, including resolutions of the Security Council, is fundamental for the realization of a just and peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict. The continued failure to comply with the law demands accountability.

NAM stresses the need for the international community to act urgently to redress the unjust and critical situation being endured by the Palestinian people under Israel's decades of military occupation. The members of the Security Council cannot remain onlookers, but rather must act to contribute to advancing the efforts to resolve the prolonged, tragic conflict by which the Palestinian people have been deprived too long of their inalienable human rights, including the right to self-determination and the right to return and enjoy freedom in their independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Israeli Air Force has continued to violate Lebanese airspace, intensifying its incursions into Lebanon, including recent low-altitude flights over Beirut. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, particularly resolution 1701 (2006).

They are also a clear infringement of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles and provisions of international law. NAM calls on the Security Council to condemn those violations in the strongest possible terms and to prevail on Israel to end its violations of Lebanese sovereignty — whether by air, sea or land — and to fulfil all of its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006).

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement is concerned about the Israeli military fortifications in violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement between Israeli and Syrian forces, which could result in the risk of tension, escalation and confrontation in the area. NAM reaffirms that all measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures to impose its own jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

NAM condemns in the strongest possible terms the act of aggression committed by Israel against the Syrian Arab Republic on Sunday, 5 May. NAM requests the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities by clearly condemning the Israeli aggression against the Syrian Arab Republic, taking the necessary measures to prevent its recurrence and holding Israel accountable for that act of aggression.

I shall now speak in my national capacity to briefly react to what was said by the representative of the Israeli regime against my country.

With regard to the presidential election, I should say that the Iranian nation is proud to have held a democratic election with more than a 70 per cent turnout, wherein Mr. Rouhani won a landslide majority on 14 June. The high turnout once more showed the vibrancy of the Iranian polity and society and the strong potential that exists for dealing with any impediments along the way towards the stability and enhancement of Iran's international stature. That is a reality that the Israeli regime cannot endure. That is why, in the days remaining before the presidential inauguration, it has already started its smear campaign to distort the facts about Iran's election and elected officials. That reflects its deep concern about any development towards stability and tranquillity in the region.

On Iran's nuclear issue, which is exclusively peaceful in nature and in full conformity with our international obligations, I should say that we are not only party to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, but we are party to all major international instruments banning weapons of mass destruction and are fully committed to all the relevant legal obligations under those treaties. The Israeli regime's non-adherence to the international instruments on weapons of mass destruction and its non-compliance with its related obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and international law, however, are well-known facts.

Furthermore, the Israeli-regime's brutal practices in killing innocent women and children, in particular during the 33-day war against Lebanon and the 22-day attack on Gaza, are also well-known facts. The regime's terrorist operations all around the world, including the assassination of Iran's nuclear scientists, are known to the world as well. To cover up its terrorist nature, the Israeli regime tries to pin the blame for terrorism on others. That is partly because of the impunity that the regime enjoys.

The European Union's indecision to condemn Israel for all its State terrorism, on the one hand, while putting Hizbullah's military branch on a terrorism list, on the other, based on false and unjust accusations, is a double-standard approach towards terrorism. Hizbullah is part of Lebanon's socio-political fabric and is respected and accepted by the people of Lebanon as a legitimate resistance movement against the Israeli regime's aggression. The European Union's decision will not generate any doubts as to the popular character of Hizbullah; rather, it will further complicate the situation in the Middle East. The European Union should live up to its responsibility in redressing the situation and reconsider its decision.

In conclusion, our advice to the representative of the Israeli regime is that instead of levelling baseless allegations against others in the region, it would do better to abide by the norms and regulations of international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to correct its behaviour for the sake of peace and stability in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): The delegation of Indonesia is pleased to participate in this open debate. In that regard, I would first like to thank the United States, as President of the Council for the month of July, for convening this meeting. My delegation is also grateful to the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Robert Serry, for his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

In making these remarks, Indonesia would also like to associate itself with the statements delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Middle East region continues to undergo great instability, with tragic human consequences, a dire humanitarian situation and an uncertain conclusion. Indonesia remains deeply committed to, and concerned about, the prospects for peace in the Middle East. The question of Palestine, which is a key concern for my country, has dragged on both as a fact and as an agenda item in the Council for far too long.

We are deeply appalled that the Israeli policy in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has continued with little regard for the need to create conditions conducive to peace and a resolution of the conflict. In that regard, it remains our concern that nothing poses as obvious an obstacle to progress as the construction of illegal settlements, which constitute a strong symbol of Israel's lack of commitment to meeting the Palestinians on a productive playing field.

Similarly, throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, Israel has continued with such policies and practices as the construction of the separation wall, home demolitions, residency revocations and the closure of Palestinian institutions. In Gaza, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. Israel's blockade, which has continued for five years, is asphyxiating the economy, as it frustrates the movement of people and goods, thereby increasing unemployment and shrinking private-sector businesses.

Indonesia has always been deeply supportive of the two-State solution, based on the conviction that an independent State of Palestine, with rights and responsibilities that are coterminous with those of other States, will contribute to the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, and not detract from it.

We believe that peace on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, is the irreducible minimum basis for negotiations. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the ongoing efforts being made by the United States, including through Secretary Kerry's visits to the region in the past three months. We furthermore welcome the plans for a resumption of direct talks and look forward to that historic process.

In order to give that initiative a good chance of success, Indonesia urges Israel to halt any conduct that might impair the effort. To that end, my delegation would like to underline that Israel must be prevailed upon to recognize the futility of ignoring the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians with regard to the core issues, namely, illegal settlements, the status of Jerusalem, refugees, security and permanent borders.

If true progress is ever to be made on the Middle East file, it is essential that Israel act as a responsible partner and member of the international community. It is critical that Israel abandon the impunity through which it has ignored and defied United Nations resolutions and international law for more than 60 years. To put it simply, no nation should be immune from the consequences of violating international law, and that includes Israel. Indonesia therefore welcomes the European Union's (EU) new guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the occupied territories for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU. Under the new guidelines, the EU will not recognize any changes to pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by the parties to the Middle East peace process. In accordance with our belief that violations of international law should not be rewarded, we support that approach and commend it to other members of the international community.

Permit me now to turn to Syria.

As my delegation observed during the last debate (see S/PV.6950), the catastrophe in Syria has regrettably continued to evolve, with no response from the international community, including the Council. As members of the Council know only too well, however, the situation on the ground has become so dire that it now threatens the stability of the region. We have on our hands a grave humanitarian crisis in Syria that involves refugees and displaced persons, which calls for immediate attention. On the question of refugees, it is self-evident that the spillover of more than 1.7 million people, including 71,000 Palestinian refugees, to neighboring countries is an issue of great concern for the Governments involved. Those refugees require further assistance through international relief organizations. We should see to it that they receive the help they need.

Without doubt, part of the response to the situation in Syria is political. In that regard, Indonesia reiterates its call for a political process that will lead to a permanent solution to the conflict in accordance with the aspirations of the Syrian people. In that connection, members of the Council must put their differences aside in fulfilment of their mandate and must commence earnest measures to bring the violence to an end.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Rahman (Bangladesh): It is indeed a great honour for me to speak at this very important debate. I shall limit my statement to the issue of occupied Palestinian territories.

The saga of Palestinian misfortune is often repeated in international discourse without any effective remedy. It is a unique story of the long suffering of one segment of the human race inflicted by another, starting with the occupation of land, the alteration of history and then the escalation of violence and military incursions, leading to the imposition of inhuman conditions on the Palestinian people through the demolition of homes, the confiscation of land, closures and blockades. The Gaza borders have been subjected to a regime of closure

that is without precedent anywhere on the planet. The quality of life of the Palestinians in the entire occupied territories has been reduced to a subsistence level. For example, in Gaza 1.7 people have been living in a 360 square kilometre area. Of that number, 80 per cent are extremely poor and rely on food handouts. Some 90 per cent of the available water is unfit for human consumption, and 30 per cent of vital medicines are unavailable in the hospitals. Those are only a few disturbing statistics that demonstrate the precarious condition in which the people of Palestine, particularly women and children, are languishing. Unfortunately, all that is happening before the eyes of the international community and in the absence of any resolute action.

Despite the global outcry and International Court of Justice advisory opinion against it (see A/ES-10/273), Israel continues to build a separation wall on the West Bank, dividing and isolating communities, destroying livelihoods and preventing hundreds of thousands access to their jobs, families, markets, schools and hospitals. The repeated appeals of the international community to improve the deteriorating conditions of the Palestinian people remain unheeded.

It is abundantly clear now that there cannot be a military solution to that longstanding conflict. Peace cannot be achieved in that land by force or through military means. Only through negotiations can there be a viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Security Council cannot evade its role, particularly since its own resolutions adopted over time on the matter remain unimplemented. The stalled peace process must restart. We believe that the Fourth Geneva Convention, resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), the principle of land for peace, the terms of refernce of the Madrid Peace Conference, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative are the best guides for achieving a peaceful solution. We see a flicker of hope in Secretary of State John Kerry's efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table. We fully support that initiative.

The root cause of the conflict is the occupation, which must end sooner than later. The settlements present an existential threat to the viability of a future Palestinian State. They are contrary to international law and the road map, and must therefore cease. If peace in the Middle East is to be achieved, we must prevail upon Israel to cease further illegal settlements and dismantle the existing ones, in line with its obligations under article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In that regard, we consider the recent action of the European Union to be the right move in the right direction.

The upgraded status of Palestine at the United Nations last year was a small step towards amending a historical injustice. Much work lies ahead to create the conditions that will allow a meaningful and just solution. Our goal remains realizing the inalienable and legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people by creating an independent, viable and contiguous State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and harmony. The realization of that goal needs our collective resolve. Let us all commit to working for lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Lasso Mendoza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I would like to begin by thanking you for convening today's open debate, which allows us to express our points of view on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine question.

The Government of Ecuador expresses once again its concern over the Security Council's prolonged management of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The intransigence of Israel, with its illegal colonization policy, has closed every door to a bilateral solution. Therefore, it is time for the parties to seek an alternative to the conflict in order to achieve peace between the State of Palestine and Israel.

My country believes that it is time to restart the peace process, which has been stalled since 2010, and insists that it be a credible and serious process based on clear parameters and framed within a specific timeline. President Abbas has responded that any peace proposal must first be political and never subsumed by economic arguments. In reference to the economic plan proposed by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, he has been clear in his rejection of temporary agreements and provisional borders that sidestep political solutions.

President Abbas has called on the Government of Israel to come to the negotiating table with specific maps in order to have borders on the basis of which it will be possible to reach a final agreement. My country recognizes that these borders should be those of 1967, in accordance with relevant resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative

of 2002. Palestine, with the support of the international community, is committed to peace on that basis.

Israel, the occupying Power, is rejecting a peaceful solution with its settlement policy, the construction of a separating wall, land confiscations, house demolitions, the displacement of civilians and unlawful detentions. Settler terrorism against the Palestinians on their lands should be condemned. The Security Council itself should be called upon to meet its obligations under the Charter in that regard. The high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention should also be called upon to fulfil their responsibilities, as those actions constitute serious violations.

Finally, Ecuador reaffirms its commitment to recognizing Palestine as a full Member State, which is its just status. We need to increase calls upon all countries around the world to recognize Palestine. That is the peace that the majority on our planet demands.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mcakuvana (South Africa): Mr. President, let me join others in congratulating you and your country on assuming the presidency of the Security Council during the month of July. My delegation expresses its appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry for briefing the Council today. We associate ourselves with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and thank the Ambassadors of Palestine and Israel for their statements.

Since October 2010, there has been no significant signal that direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine would resume any time soon, despite regional, international and other efforts to defuse the stalemate in the peace process. The agile re-engagement of the United States in the peace process in recent times is commendable. We appreciate in particular the efforts undertaken by Mr. John Kerry to facilitate the resumption of the peace talks between the parties.

South Africa welcomes the announcement that an agreement has been reached between Israel and Palestine that will form the foundation for the resumption of final status negotiations, despite outstanding disagreements especially with respect to the critical issue of the illegal settlements that Israel continues to construct with impunity. We call on Israel to reconsider its position on settlements and refrain from these illegal acts, which may negatively affect the spirit of negotiations.

We commend the Palestinians for agreeing to return to negotiations under such arduous and difficult conditions. That shows their commitment to peace through a spirit of compromise, which is essential if this intractable conflict is to be resolved. We call on all the Palestinian parties and organizations, including Hamas, to see that as a positive step towards lasting peace. The future of Palestine is significantly dependent on the unity of its people. Therefore, we encourage the Palestinians to strive for unity as a weapon against those who are bent on dividing them for their own benefit.

On a positive note, we welcome Israel's decision to free some Palestinian prisoners as a confidence-building measure and a gesture of their commitment to the peace talks. However, South Africa is deeply concerned at the plight of the Palestinians who are illegally imprisoned in Israeli jails and have long lived in appalling conditions. We once again call on Israel to respect the human rights of all Palestinian prisoners and abide by relevant international human rights and humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. As the international community, we have a responsibility to put our shoulders to the wheel and assist the parties in all manner of ways to ensure that the negotiations yield positive results.

Clearly, the success of negotiations requires an immediate end to acts of aggression occasioned by continued home demolitions, price tag attacks, illegal excavations of religious sites and the restriction of access and movement. Settler attacks on civilians, the desecration of Palestinian mosques and churches, the destruction of property and the felling of olive trees should be condemned in the strongest possible terms and ultimately stopped.

With regard to the situation in Gaza, South Africa remains deeply concerned about Israel's continued blockade. The blockade and restrictions imposed are in violation of international humanitarian law, including article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and contrary to the will of the international community as expressed in various Security Council resolutions, including 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009), among other international legal instruments and frameworks.

We welcome the decision of the European Union (EU) to put pressure on Israel by publishing new

guidelines banning the Union's funding for entities linked to settlements or territories occupied since the 1967 war. As is well known, that decision is in line with the EU's position on settlements and should be a clear sign to Israel that settlements are not just illegal but can also attract retributive actions from law-abiding nations and organizations. We hope that other countries and organizations will also consider applying pressure on Israel so as to coerce it to abandon its regressive policy of settlement construction.

South Africa is deeply concerned about the situation in Syria and hopes that a solution will soon be found before many more are killed, injured or displaced. We would like to emphasize our concern about the plight of the Palestinian refugees in Syria, some of whom have now left the country due to the ongoing violence. It is encouraging that, despite the hardships that come with being a refugee, a Palestinian refugee emerged recently as the winner of the Arab Idol singing competition. That is one of those achievements that are a testimony to the resilience of the human spirit. The decision by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to name Mohammad Assaf the UNRWA Regional Youth Ambassador for Palestine Refugees is most welcome. That should encourage the Palestinians to continue with their struggle until their liberation is complete.

Finally, last week we celebrated Nelson Mandela International Day and reflected on the life of President Mandela, who has dedicated his life to the freedom of his people and that of the Palestinians. I believe it would be appropriate for me to conclude with his wisdom as regards the issue of Palestine: "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians". Let us therefore work together to free the Palestinians from the bondage of occupation and deliver them to the promised land of freedom, for which they so yearn.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Sir, for having convened this meeting and Mr. Serry for his briefing.

Despite the passage of more than six decades since the Arab-Israeli conflict began and despite the many efforts made and initiatives proposed to reach a comprehensive and lasting solution thereto, unfortunately unilateral stances are prolonging the illegitimate occupation and attempts to change the demographic nature of the Palestinian territories, especially the Judaization of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, continue. The arrest and detention of Palestinians, the continued unjust blockade against Gaza, measures to strangle the Palestinian economy, especially the withholding of tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority, and other illegal and illegitimate practices and measures — all of these factors have undermined international efforts and returned us time and again to square one. Tensions have thus spread throughout the region and the chances of conflicts escalating increased, with ramifications not only for the Middle East but the entire world.

My country has a well-established record of engaging in international and bilateral efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the conflict that would take into account the interests of the various parties and lead to the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and a withdrawal from occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories.

In the light of all of this, we see the current efforts of the United States to end the deadlock in the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians as a reaffirmation of the importance that the international community attaches to negotiation, dialogue and respect for the resolutions of international legitimacy. This was reaffirmed at the Arab summit held in March in Doha, which reaffirmed its support for the Arab Peace Initiative and efforts to achieve its implementation in cooperation with the international community.

We take this opportunity to express our readiness to spare no effort to support these international efforts, and we look forward to seeing similar support from the international community so that we do not waste this opportunity, which promises so much in the midst of such complicated events in the Middle East.

In this context, we welcome the recent decision of the European Union (EU) to withhold financial assistance from Israeli organizations that are active in the occupied Palestinian territories and not to recognize any changes in the pre-1967 borders. This is a clear decision to support the internationally legitimate resolutions and international law in general, and indicates the rejection by the international community

of the illegal settlements and of any developments that may threaten the prospects for a two-State solution. We hope that other States will follow suit and emulate the EU precedent in this context.

When discussing the situation in the Middle East, we must recognize that the current situation in Syria poses a clear threat and challenge to the international community. The Syrian regime's insistence on pursuing a security solution and State terrorism, in the light of the failure of the international community to achieve a swift and decisive solution, may have dangerous repercussions and could unleash a spillover that would threaten the sovereignty, territorial integrity and social unity of Syria, as well as peace and security in neighbouring countries and beyond.

The Syrian regime is holding the Syrian people hostage and using them as fuel for its continued existence, with no regard for the grave results of such a policy. In this regard, it is relying on the existing division within the Security Council. The number of victims among the innocent civilian population has exceeded 100,000, in addition to the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, and the systematic destruction of homes and facilities and countless other violations. The Security Council must therefore adopt effective and swift measures based on its responsibility enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

The international community, as represented by the United Nations, has issued numerous resolutions addressing the various violations committed against the Syrian people. The world is therefore confused and frustrated, and questions how long the regime will continue its killing, destruction and displacement of innocent civilians and why the resolutions of the international community are being ignored.

An objective review of the substance of the more than 15 resolutions of the Security Council, General Assembly and Human Rights Council concerning the situation in Syria reveals the extent and variety of the violations against the Syrian people. It is very clear that the regime is willing to resort to any means, even at the price of destroying the entire Syrian nation and imperiling the peace and security of the region and the world.

Since its inception, the United Nations has played an international humanitarian role that has made us proud. The Security Council has moved very quickly to end many violations. Therefore, the Syrian people — children, women, men, the elderly and all the victims of the conflict — are looking impatiently to the Security Council for an effective solution that will bring about a just resolution based on international law and international legitimacy and bring those responsible for crimes and violations to justice so that the Syrian people can define their own future and exercise self-determination following their prolonged suffering.

The international community deals with such violations, wherever they occur, on the basis of internationally defined criteria and standards. The Security Council has the responsibility to intervene wherever such violations take place and to end them in a manner that enjoys international legitimacy and preserves human dignity.

The violations and horrors being committed by the Syrian regime on a daily basis would lead any fair-minded person to wonder whether that regime actually believes in the Charter of the United Nations and in international humanitarian and human rights law. Why does it pursue its aggressive and irresponsible policies, in violation of human and divine law? Should not the United Nations therefore take a firm position to assist the Syrian people and hold responsible those who continue to inflict such suffering? How can the international conscience bear any more sorrow?

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Dhanapala (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers in commending you, Sir, for having convened this important debate. The Sri Lankan delegation associates itself with the statement made by representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

According to statistics recently released by the United Nations country team in the occupied Palestinian territory, immediate measures are required to assuage the human suffering in the area. If unethical practices continue, the likelihood of a two-State solution could be diminished.

The continued construction of settlements is one of the reasons for the disruption of the peace process. Settlement activities are a factor in the recurrence of violence in the region. The international community has repeatedly called for a freeze on settlement activity.

Restrictions on imports and exports due to the blockade on Gaza are stifling economic growth. Those

restrictions need to be lifted within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009), as that would contribute significantly to the economic advancement of Gaza and the well-being of its people.

Sri Lanka also supports the work of the United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which keep the majority of the people in Gaza supplied with the basic necessities. However, the positive results of their efforts will be stymied as long as the blockade remains in place. For sustainable development to take place in the Gaza Strip, the blockade needs to be dismantled.

Both parties to the conflict must create the environment necessary to facilitate peace. There is an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice. Settlement freezes should not be seen as preconditions to negotiations, considering that they have been accepted in previous agreements. The security needs of the Israeli people must be respected. We encourage both parties to exercise the utmost restraint for the sake of the safety of civilians and for the greater goal of peace.

It is important that the international community remain engaged in the quest for a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East. Recently the Government of China hosted the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Sri Lanka supports the implementation of the General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution.

We are heartened by the efforts of the United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, in recent months to revive the peace process, and we call upon both parties to demonstrate goodwill and engage in confidence-building measures to pave the way for renewed negotiations. We also recognize that the viability of the two-State solution will depend on the political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people, and we are confident that Palestinian internal reconciliation efforts will continue. The progress made by the Palestinian Authority is commendable.

Sri Lanka supports Palestine's application for admission to full membership in the United Nations, and it is our hope that the Security Council will play a more constructive role in making that a reality.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela endorses the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Our country condemns the continued denial of the inalienable rights of Palestinian people due to the Israeli military occupation of the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, and the illegal measures taken by the occupying Power, which result in civilian casualties, humanitarian and socioeconomic deprivation, and the destruction of Palestinian institutions, properties, infrastructure, and land and water resources, fragmenting its territory.

Venezuela rejects in particular the construction of settlements and of the separation barrier; the use of lethal force against Palestinian civilians, including unarmed demonstrators; the detention and ill-treatment of political prisoners; the imposition of a blockade on the Gaza Strip; and the establishment of hundreds of checkpoints in the West Bank. Likewise, we object to the withholding of Palestinian revenues and the various other measures aimed at isolating East Jerusalem and modifying its historical character.

The State of Israel has since 1947 systematically disregarded the relevant resolutions of the United Nations that advocate a two-State solution. Israel ignores the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international humanitarian law.

Our country supports any action taken by the State of Palestine aimed at seizing the opportunities offered to it by the United Nations and reiterates its full support for the desire of Palestine to be a full State Member of the Organization.

Venezuela eagerly awaits the resumption of the political dialogue between the State of Palestine and Israel and reiterates its call on the occupying Power to end the policies that stand in the way of that goal.

In that regard, we aspire to a bilateral solution, with a contiguous and economically viable Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations.

The Government of Venezuela believes that the Syrian Arab Republic must be respected and that the only way to resolve the conflict in that country is through political dialogue between the Syrian authorities and the opposition, which is the Syrian people themselves see as the only alternative.

Venezuela deplores the fact that arms are being supplied from abroad to groups involved in terrorist activities that refuse to participate in a political dialogue.

My country rejects any foreign intervention in violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity and political independence of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Weisleder (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, we commend you and the Mission of the United States on your skilful and effective leadership of the Council during this month of July.

Costa Rica has decided to speak at this meeting, as we believe that it comes at a particularly important and auspicious moment for the Middle East. The interest we attach to this debate is evidenced by the five continuous hours that we have remained here to listen to the speakers. Unlike in previous months, today there is a small glimmer of hope that a negotiated solution might be found to the long and complex conflict between the States of Israel and Palestine, with clear repercussions for the rest of the area.

While the eventual negotiation process is still in its preliminary stages and many difficulties still lie ahead, we must underscore the constructive and systematically dedicated role that has been played by the Secretary of State of the United States, John Kerry. His commitment and effective efforts merit our gratitude.

Costa Rica, as a peace-loving country that voluntarily disarmed more than 60 years ago, is a firm believer in a peaceful solution to conflicts between peoples and States, in the framework of international law and multilateral diplomacy. We are therefore delighted by the announcement made last week regarding the beginning of talks between the Palestinian and Israeli parties aimed at establishing the basis for direct negotiations leading to what is an accepted objective for the international community, that is, peaceful coexistence between an independent and viable Palestinian State and the State of Israel.

We know that this is but a first step. The road ahead is full of difficulties and obstacles. There will certainly be those who seek to impose their perverse goals or exclusive viewpoints, or their obsolete intolerance or extremism, which not only rejects reconciliation and prevents progress in this difficult process, but is also based on outdated, sterile and unjust visions for both peoples.

Costa Rica has no false illusions about this emerging negotiation process, but we believe in the creative power of good judgement, realism and human persistence. We believe that history is written, first and foremost, thanks to the will of individuals. Through that will, and within realistic parameters, human action can change the course of events. That is what we are now witnessing as a possibility in this prolonged and painful conflict. It is essential to exchange the logic of confrontation, blame and war for one of good faith, resolve, good will and peace. The logic of peace will transform confrontation into a search for common ground, demands into proposals and hatred into hope for tomorrow. We believe that the Israeli and Palestinian leadership, and those who share in helping them to shoulder their great responsibilities, will have the courage to move forward whenever possible so as to overcome their differences. None of the parties will achieve everything they are seeking, but there is an opportunity for all to attain the minimum to which they aspire and for both sides to achieve the end goal of peace and coexistence.

The Security Council, the Secretary-General and the United Nations as a whole should work so that leaders can help their peoples understand that concessions are not defeats, but rather the cement that binds together the pieces of a structure that, if it is completed, will become the home where each of those peoples live in a safer and more peaceful neighbourhood. In order to resolve this conflict, the extremists must be isolated and the moderate forces strengthened on both sides. As

an organization and as countries we should be ready to cooperate in that undertaking. Costa Rica is prepared to participate in that task, however small our contribution may be. We are not stakeholders in this effort, but as a peace-loving country, a friend of Israel and of Palestine, and a society accustomed to peaceful coexistence, we call on the parties to do their best in tirelessly seeking just and legal solutions to their differences and to work with whomever can help them where necessary in order to emerge from an impasse.

We believe that sooner rather than later we will be returning to this Chamber, no longer calling for tolerance and intelligence in order to begin the negotiating process between Palestinians and Israelis but rather to celebrate their agreements and the end of the conflict, and to begin to discuss plans for harmonious relations between their peoples.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): In her briefing to the Security Council earlier this month on the situation in Syria, Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos said, "We are watching the destruction of not only a country, but also its people" (*S/PV.7000, p. 2*). With 100,000 people dead and millions who have fled from the violence and become refugees or internally displaced persons, and with a breakdown of vital education and health services, the situation can only be described as a tragedy. The Government of Syria, along with all other parties to the conflict, must abide strictly by international humanitarian and human rights law, including by affording immediate access to humanitarian assistance.

We strongly urge the Security Council to overcome its internal differences and focus on exercising its leadership role in fostering a political and peaceful solution to the civil war in Syria. The parties have demonstrated that they are not going to lay down arms without external interference, and the Council has yet to demonstrate that it is doing all in its power to prevent further human tragedy. Before the conflict escalates further, with even more serious consequences for regional peace and security, we ask that the Council please take action.

In the meantime we welcome the briefing to be given in the General Assembly next Monday by Mr. Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. As long as the Council is not living up to its responsibility regarding the conflict, it is important that the wider membership engage in the matter. Earlier this month, when Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited Reykjavik and spoke at the University of Iceland, he said, "The people of Syria need peace, but all they have for the moment are talks about talks. We must do better." Indeed, we must do better.

Last week, we celebrated Mandela International Day to pay tribute to Nelson Mandela's legacy and what he stands for. Mr. Mandela once said that we are not truly free if we take away someone else's freedom, just as surely as we are not free when our freedom is taken from us.

I now turn to the Palestinian question. The occupation affects all Palestinians as well as the Israelis. They are affected in different ways, since one is the occupied and the other the occupier, but both are affected. The security of the Palestinians is greatly affected, not least for young men, but also for those who now live at close quarters with the settlements, and with settlers becoming increasingly violent towards Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The security of Israelis is also affected, including by the firing of rockets from Gaza, indiscriminately and in clear violation of international law, threatening and terrorizing the civilian population in southern Israel.

Iceland believes in a peaceful solution to the conflict, and we believe it is urgent and possible that the parties come to an agreement. We therefore very much welcome the renewed engagement of the United States in reviving the peace process. We particularly welcome the announcement last Friday by Secretary of State Kerry that an agreement has been reached that establishes a basis for resuming direct final status negotiations. We hope that this time the negotiations will result in two States, living side by side in peace and security, which is the only way forward for both parties and the only means by which relations between Israel and its neighbours can be normalized. Until an agreement is actually reached, however, the international community must continue to do its utmost to prevent and address ongoing violations of humanitarian law and international human rights law on the ground.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In our national capacity, we wish to highlight some important aspects of the subject we are discussing today.

Time and again, the Security Council convenes these debates on the Middle East without making any progress. It is deplorable that the situation in the region in general and the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, in particular remains unresolved. The region continues to be marked by instability and insecurity. The principal political problem of the Middle East is the systematic aggression of Israel, the occupying Power, against Palestine. It is urgent that the Security Council assume its designated role as a defender of international peace and security and take concrete, practical steps to make Israel end its abuses against the Palestinian people.

Israel's behaviour deliberately contravenes United Nations resolutions, poses a threat to regional and international peace and security, and violates the human rights of an entire people. Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the main obstacle to attaining a just, durable and comprehensive peaceful solution in the Middle East. As long as these acts of aggression continue and unless the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are taken into consideration, there can be no peace in the Middle East.

The General Assembly took an unprecedented step when it granted Palestine non-member observer status at the United Nations. In keeping with its historic stance of supporting the cause of the Palestinian people to uphold their rights, Cuba supported that decision. The Cuban delegation reiterates its support for admitting Palestine as a fully-fledged State Member of the United Nations. The Security Council must consider and promptly approve the request submitted by Palestine in 2011 for the United Nations to recognize it as a Member State.

The current situation in the region is tense and explosive. Reports indicate the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, further complicating the living conditions of its inhabitants following the tightened blockade in that area. The Palestinian people are suffering more as a result of the growing number of illegal Israeli settlements, the difficulties and pain experienced by Palestinian prisoners, and the closing of access to goods, humanitarian aid and fuel to the Gaza Strip. Only the end of the settlement policy, the release of Palestinian prisoners and the lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip would make it possible to embark on a significant political process that could lead to peace throughout the region.

Cuba will continue to support the Palestinian people in their legitimate and just struggle for self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It insists that Israel comply with international law and withdraw from all Arab territories it occupies. Once again, Cuba reiterates its support for a just and lasting peace among all the people of the Middle East.

Cuba continues to follow closely the situation in Syria and its international repercussions. It remains alarmed that those who seek regime change are calling for the use of force and violence instead of encouraging dialogue and negotiation. It is the duty of this organ to strengthen peace, not violence; to prevent instability, not to contribute to financing, arming or training those who want to destabilize the country; and to protect innocent people, not to use or manipulate them for geopolitical purposes. That is also the responsibility of the Organization as a whole.

Cuba is opposed to NATO's manoeuvring to obtain the approval of the Security Council to attack Syria. It also rejects the media's habitual complicity in distorting reality and failing to answer for the consequences of its actions. A civil war in Syria or the intervention of foreign forces would have dire consequences for international peace and security and in particular for the volatile Middle East.

Cuba is concerned about the loss of innocent lives in Syria and everywhere else in the world. It condemns all acts of violence against innocent civilians perpetrated by those engaged in this and all others conflicts. It rejects the need to protect human lives being used as a pretext for foreign intervention, be it direct or through irregular armed groups, including mercenaries, who only sow destruction and death. We reaffirm the right of the people of Syria to exercise full self-determination and sovereignty, free from foreign interference or intervention.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Román-Morey (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to commend you, Sir, for convening an open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We are also grateful to the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry.

Since 1947, when Peru joined the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, it has consistently maintained a clear position on the question of Palestine, in line with the norms and principles of international law, and in particular with people's right to self determination. Peru therefore recognizes the need to implement General Assembly resolution 181 (III), which lays the groundwork for the creation of two States in Palestinian territory, one Arab and one Jewish, coexisting peacefully within mutually recognized, secure borders, free from threat or acts of force.

Recognizing the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to establish its own independent State, and convinced that the creation of a Palestinian State is crucial for finding a peaceful, lasting solution to this conflict, Peru has recognized Palestine as a State and has supported resolutions adopted by the United Nations, including the historic General Assembly resolution 67/19 of 29 November 29, which it co-sponsored, granting Palestine non-member observer status within the Organization. In line with these same principles, Peru voted in favour of Palestine's request to join UNESCO.

In the same spirit, and as a sign of respect for the two-State solution, Peru also recognizes the unwavering right of the State of Israel to develop peacefully and in harmony with its neighbours, within secure borders and free of any threat against its citizens. Peru also firmly condemns any act of aggression against Israel. However, while it recognizes the right of Israel to preserve its existence and security, this right must abide by human rights and be enjoyed within internationally defined and recognized borders.

My delegation reiterates that, under international law, the acquisition of territories by force is unacceptable, nullifying any act committed by Israel to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration. In line with the provisions of numerous General Assembly resolutions, Peru calls for an immediate end to settlement activities, demolitions and evictions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

In keeping with its traditional and unwavering commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes, Peru reaffirms its full support for a lasting peace in the Middle East, which can come about only as a result of direct negotiations between the parties and on the basis of full compliance by all stakeholders with their obligations under the Madrid principles, the Quartet road map and other agreements, in full respect for international law, including the relevant Security Council resolutions. Peru therefore welcomes the initiative of United States Secretary of State John Kerry to revive the peace process in the Middle East, as well as any other peace initiative that could lead to the implementation of the two-State solution 65 years after it was first conceived.

In conclusion, my delegation expresses its serious concern over the intensification of the conflict in Syria, which, according to reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has already claimed more than 90,000 lives and seen grave violations of human rights, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Peru condemns all types of violence, by whomsoever committed, and expresses its concern for the manifestations of sectarianism in the conflict. We call on the international community to urge the parties to launch an inclusive political dialogue, free from preconditions, that will promote a political transition in Syria on the basis of the road map set out in the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Mukerji (India): Let me begin by expressing our appreciation to the delegation of the United States for convening this quarterly open debate, which will allow the Council to take stock of recent developments in the Middle East, including the State of Palestine. I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his comprehensive briefing.

We welcome United States efforts, including the visits of Secretary of State John Kerry, to re-engage Israel and Palestine in direct talks. We hope that the recent announcement of the two sides of their intention to restart direct talks, after perhaps one of the longest periods of stalemate since the signing of the Oslo accords, will lead to concrete results. In that context, it is necessary to address the issue of Israeli settlement activities, which have continued unabated and remain

a serious obstacle. Those activities are not only illegal, but also pose a serious threat to the two-State solution. We join others in urging Israel to halt settlement activities.

The blockade of Gaza is also continuing and adversely affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. While we appreciate the measures taken by Israel to allow the flow of essential goods into Gaza, those measures cannot be a substitute for lifting the blockade.

The Palestinian Authority continues to face one of its worst financial crises, which threatens to erode the progress made in building Palestinian State institutions. It is important that the international community continue to support the financial needs of the Palestine Authority.

As a member of the Council in 2011 and 2012, India supported Palestine's bid for full and equal membership in the United Nations. Continuing its support, India co-sponsored General Assembly resolution 67/19 in November 2012, which upgraded the status of Palestine to that of non-member observer State. India continues to partner with the Palestinian Authority in its socioeconomic development, including through the provision of direct budgetary grants, training programmes and projects led by the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum.

India also continues its consistent support for a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, living within secure and recognized borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in various United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. We call on the international community to redouble its efforts for an early resolution of the conflict.

Before I conclude, let me express our deep concern at the deterioration of the situation in Syria. We look forward to an early holding of the "Geneva II" conference, which should help to commence a Syrian-led, inclusive political dialogue that resolves the current crisis and meets the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society. Any further militarization will only exacerbate the conflict and must be avoided by all parties concerned, internal as well as external.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Serry to respond to comments.

Mr. Serry: I will be brief. We have had another long but, in my view, relatively instructive debate in which nearly all speakers have registered their strong support for the important United States-led effort to relaunch meaningful negotiations and not, as a few have noted, merely talks about talks. Virtually every speaker has also stressed the urgency of the situation and the immediate need for these efforts to provide, at long last, a credible political horizon for achieving a two-State solution.

That means that we are heading into yet another important period, and I want to assure the Council of the Secretary-General's and my own support for the important efforts under way. I would stress, in the light of some statements, that our support includes providing, as requested, fair, balanced and factual briefings on what all will agree is a very complex situation in the Middle East.

The President: I thank Mr. Serry for the clarification he has provided.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.